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**Managing difference: Postgraduate students'  
experience and perspectives of multicultural group  
work in an internationalising university**

**by**

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of the requirements for the degree of

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## ABSTRACT

With the increasing internationalisation of Higher Education, which saw the number of international students double in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century according to an OECD report (Rebolledo-Gomez & Ranchin, 2013), universities around the world have been trying to improve the learning experience and enhance student employability in order to maintain an international reputation. Multicultural groupwork, which has the power to “force” students of different cultural backgrounds to work together has been increasingly used in the name of developing students’ intercultural skills and prepare them to become “Global Citizens” under this internationalisation of Higher Education agenda. However, it needs to be questioned whether simply mixing students of different backgrounds in a group necessarily leads to them working collaboratively with each other. Challenges and negative perceptions of the experience have been repeatedly reported in the literature (Summers & Volet, 2008; Turner, 2009). However, most studies in this area were conducted by academic staff who were researching their own students, which might affect how students report their experiences. Additionally, there is little research focusing on intercultural skills development within student groups. By taking a “from students, for students, and about students” stance, I will address this research gap, not only by looking at students’ perceptions of their multicultural groupwork experience, but also by looking into the development of transferable skills. My research also addresses factors that influence students’ attitudes in order to identify possible actions to foster a better intercultural learning environment. A mixed methods approach was adopted to answer my research inquiry, via two questionnaires involving 286 respondents and two rounds of interviews involving 19 participants, which were conducted at the early stage and end stage of a master’s degree course. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected about postgraduate students’ attitudes towards

multicultural groupwork, their perceptions of the groupwork experience and how they coped with the difficulties they encountered in the process.

While the quantitative findings indicated that overall postgraduate students showed no change of attitudes during their one-year course of study, they largely recognised the benefits and value of working in multicultural groups. The qualitative analysis allowed a deeper exploration of the quantitative findings, for example, elaboration on the difficulties they voiced and challenges they had to deal with. Participants in this study nonetheless confirmed that they did develop skills through working in groups, as well as many creative coping strategies to deal with difficulties that happened during the groupwork process, such as different levels of language proficiency and different working styles. The implications of the study are that further support by academic teaching staff and university administration is needed to promote intercultural awareness and provide intercultural skills training to help students understand culturally different communication and working styles before they undertake group projects. The findings also suggest that current assessment criteria, which largely focus on the end product of multicultural group work rather than the process, should be changed, as the true value of working in multicultural groups exists in the interaction of students studying collaboratively.

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## Declaration

I declare that the present thesis is my own work except where acknowledgement is given to outside sources. I also confirm that the thesis contains no material which has previously been submitted to this University or to any other institution for another degree, diploma, certificate or qualification.

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## Abbreviations

GW	Group work
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
MGW	Multicultural group work

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Rationale of the study

In pursuing the new internationalisation of Higher Education agenda to produce “global citizens”, universities are starting to address the challenge of promoting social and academic integration among the increasingly diverse student body. As many educators now acknowledge, simply mixing students of different backgrounds in a group does not necessarily lead to them working collaboratively with each other. The scale of the problem is reflected in numerous examples of attempts to support students in working together on group projects. Many universities now provide guidelines for students about group work and some of them introduce group work to students as a valuable learning activity, explaining what group work is, why group work is used and the benefits of group work (University of Birmingham, 2017; The University of Edinburgh, 2017; The University of Sydney, 2017). Some offer an overview of the entire group work process including different stages of working together and the various challenges students might come across (University of Leicester, 2017; The University of Queensland, 2017; The University of Auckland, 2017). Some even provide online learning resources to help students with group work problems and suggestions of software to make group work easier (e.g., Oxford Brookes University, 2017). However none of these examples mention the particular challenges of working in multicultural groups. These clearly contribute to the discouraging reality of group work in Higher Education Institutions.

For example, home students do not necessarily perceive international students as competent in group discussions and worry that their scores will be dragged down by international students (e.g., Leki, 2001). However, other studies have indicated that this fear is unfounded, and have shown that some academic staff even consider international students to be academically superior (De Vita, 2002; Trice, 2004). In the education literature, various researchers have highlighted how international students themselves have expressed their concerns over challenges in working in groups (Campbell & Li, 2006; Kimmel & Volet, 2012; Turner, 2006; Volet & Ang,

1998). In Edwards and Ran's (2006) study of Chinese students' needs in British Higher Education, the authors demonstrate that working collaboratively in groups is a culturally challenging concept for Chinese students, and they need to be persuaded about its value. In their research, students complained about the group discussion lacking structure, and that the lecturers were not providing a cogent summary of the main points emerging from any teaching situation (Edwards & Ran, 2006). Chinese students have also been reported to struggle with communicating their ideas regarding what is the appropriate thing to say and how to say it (Parks & Raymond, 2004).

Concerns over the quality of group work are expressed by Summers and Volet (2010), because group work is not necessarily equal to collaboratively learning: it should not just be about splitting the tasks but learning collaboratively with peers, through peers and building something together and supporting each other.

Hence, there is a need for universities to look further into how students think about multicultural group work and if there is anything that can be done to foster a better intercultural collaborative learning environment for students to achieve anticipated learning gains and deliver on the promise of developing global graduates.

## 1.2 Context and background of the study

### **1.2.1 Why international students' experience is becoming increasingly important**

Globalisation of economies and societies has influenced HEI in different areas and levels. The increasing international student population is one of the most important reasons for the current change. According to a recent OECE report as many as 4.5 million tertiary students are being enrolled outside their country of citizenship to date, and this number was doubled in the past decade (Rebolledo-Gomez & Ranchin, 2013). This increasing global mobility makes the student population in universities significantly different from what it looked like 10 years earlier. This same OECD report also pointed out that more than half of the international students were Asians (53%). Among all these international students, the largest groups were from China, India and Korea. The five most popular study abroad destinations were

the United States (17%), United Kingdom (13%), Australia (6%), Germany (6%) and France (6%) (Rebolledo-Gomez & Ranchin, 2013).

In the United Kingdom, international students from China (PRC), India, Nigeria, the United States of America and Malaysia are the largest five groups of non-EU students, and students from Germany, Republic of Ireland, France, Greece and Cyprus are the largest five groups from EU (UKCISA, 2013). The Higher Education Institution where the current study was conducted, the University of Warwick, has an international student population reflecting this global trend.

International students have the tendency to study abroad for specific knowledge and courses. In the UK, the following five courses are most popular among international students: Business & Administrative Studies, Engineering & Technology, Social Studies, Creative Arts & Design, and Languages. However, some courses have a higher percentage of international students. The descending order of percentage of international students enrolled on courses is as follows: Business & Administrative Studies, Engineering & Technology, Computer Science, Law, Architecture, Building & Planning (UKCISA, 2013). At the University of Warwick, the departments with the greatest numbers and proportions of international students are Warwick Business School and Warwick Manufacturing Group, especially in the postgraduate population (The University of Warwick, 2014).

Universities and destination countries benefit greatly from taking on large numbers of international students: 25.8 billion pounds sterling has been generated for the UK economy by international students and their visitors (Universities UK, 2017). The profit for universities and positive impact on local areas had led to Higher Education Institutions in the UK making much more effort to provide a better student experience for all students.

Many universities have started to invest more in creating a more positive intercultural learning environment, hoping to benefit all students to become better global graduates to be competitive in the future job market. Research conducted for the UK National Centre for Universities and Business on student employability highlighted that employers are all looking for excellent communicators and the ability to work in multicultural teams (Diamond, Walkley, Forbes, Hughes, & Sheen, 2011). The motivation behind this is about keeping up a global profile and

reputation around the world, so that the universities can benefit from networks of alumni around the world, such as building a better global research network, as well as attracting more future international students.

The international population in Higher Education Institutions in the UK does not only consist of students, but also staff: 29% of the current population of academic staff in the United Kingdom are non-UK nationalities (Universities UK, 2017). International academic staff also have an impact on students' learning experience because their own intercultural skills will also affect how they deliver the teaching, so there is an increasing demand on academic staff to be effective intercultural learners themselves (Leask, 2013).

There is also a transition from the “international classroom”, which is composed of three interacting agents: home students, international students and academic staff, to an “internationalised classroom”, which aims for a better intercultural learning environment and much deeper engagement and integration among home and international students and lecturers (Harrison and Peacock, 2010). In an ideal world, an internationalised classroom will be helpful to:

1) gain knowledge of other cultures and appreciation of cultural diversity; 2) gain international perspectives on the field of study; 3) develop the ability to work effectively in settings of social and cultural diversity; 4) develop the ability to think globally and consider issues from a variety of perspectives; 5) develop the ability to communicate across cultures; 6) develop the ability to engage positively with cultural others in both their professional and private lives; 7) be responsive to international communities; 8) Gain awareness of their own culture and its perspectives and how and why those are similar to and different from other cultures and their perspectives. (Harrison & Peacock, 2009, p. 127)

### **1.2.2 Multicultural group work: a product of Internationalisation of HE**

With such a large international population studying and working on campus, HEIs are seeking to internationalise. The trend towards internationalisation has been accepted by universities in Australia, the USA, Canada and the UK with full support from governments and their policies. The internationalisation of Higher Education has been defined as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (Knight, 2004, p. 2)

The reasons driving internationalisation of HE can be categorised into four types:



social/cultural (national cultural identity, intercultural understanding, citizenship development and social and community development); political (foreign policy, national security, technical assistance, peace and mutual understanding, national identity and regional identity), economic (economic growth and competitiveness, labour market and financial incentives) and academic (international dimension to research and teaching Extension of academic horizon, institution building, profile and status, enhancement of quality and international academic standards). (Knight, 2004, p. 23)

The majority of the current literature addresses two major issues concerning the internationalisation of higher education: internationalisation of the curriculum and the experiences of international students in UK universities (Caruana & Spurling, 2007). Researchers have argued that a more compelling reason has to be articulated for the development of students, who should be better equipped to face challenges from the modern world in the future. This is another aspect of the rationale for internationalisation. Equally importantly, academic staff also require a compelling reason to accept the institutional strategies (Webb, 2005) and students' intercultural competence is another important issue (Leask, 2013). Therefore, as the curriculum is about what is taught/learnt and how it is taught/learnt, internationalising the curriculum should focus on both the content and the learning process as well as tailor the curriculum to suit the changing and divergent needs of all students for them to become "global citizens" (Leask, 2013). Global citizens are mentioned frequently in HE context by policy makers and universities in their strategies about preparing students to understand the world they live in and to work in better and be more effective as global graduates (Bourn, 2010). All higher education institutions should ensure high quality learning through developing, challenging and enhancing students' understanding of the world, even if it means changing methods and forms of learning (Bourne, McKenzie, & Shiel, 2006)

The university curriculum has to change because a much larger student population who are destined for a much wider variety of careers must be taught more efficiently, so new subjects organised round ideas of vocational relevance are constantly being introduced (Scott, 2000). According to Leask,

Internationalisation of curriculum will need to encompass a broad range of knowledge, experiences and processes, and explore and evaluate the effectiveness of many ways of teaching and assessing student learning. It will require continuous effort focused on pedagogy, learning processes, content and the achievement of outcomes, (Leask, 2013, p. 99)

This should inform some change in how multicultural group work is designed and assessed, how academic staff can facilitate the working process better and what kind of support the universities should provide for all students.

Although students are aware of the intercultural learning environment on campus, they are not engaging in these learning activities voluntarily. Group work, as it can compel students from different backgrounds to work together, can potentially serve as an effective learning process that is central to the intercultural study experience (Pokorny & Griffiths, 2010). Multicultural group work will still serve as group work, which is an active part of the curriculum as a collaborative learning activity in universities; however, it will also incorporate the experiences of international students as well as home students. These two aspects should put enhancing the multicultural group work experience for all students more in focus among all the internationalisation activities, and should be worth more investment from all stakeholders of universities. The importance of multicultural group work in students' experience has been highlighted by the latest research on the internationalisation of universities (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2015).

As discussed in section 1.1 Rationale of the study, many universities are now providing information on group work to support students' learning. In this study, I will take a definition of group work from one of the universities' websites, as their definition is likely to be closest to what university students experience as group work.

Group work involves students working collaboratively on set tasks, in or out of the classroom. Group work includes: any learning and teaching tasks or activities that require students to work in groups; any formal assessment tasks that require students to work in groups. (The University of Sydney, 2017)

The term *multicultural group work* will be used in this study to describe the activities identified in the above definition of group work, but referring to when students are working in multicultural groups. *Mixed-culture* and multicultural group work, *mixed groups* and *multicultural groups* will be used interchangeably in this research, which was conducted at the University of Warwick.

### **1.2.3 Why multicultural group work matters**

Multicultural group work matters to students. It not only provides academic benefits but also provides a platform for skills development. It helps students academically, for example, to understand a text, question a line of argument, follow a lecture, gauge the individual progress on a particular course, or evaluate a course (Tribe, 1994). It also fosters the development of a wider breadth of knowledge through discussion, as well as helping students' learning in the clarification of ideas, and evaluation of others' ideas (Hassanien, 2006). It helps students to develop interpersonal skills such as oral communication, active listening, group leadership, group membership, the ability to examine assumptions and the ability to tolerate ambiguities – all highly valued in employment (Levin, 2004; Thorley & Gregory, 1994; Tribe, 1994).

Working in multicultural groups also contributes to helping students develop intercultural skills from working with different people and experiencing different cultures (Liu & Dall'Alba, 2012). It enhances all students' understanding and appreciation of other cultures (Volet & Ang, 1998), develops students' recognition of intercultural values and builds intercultural relationships (Edmead, 2012; Osmond & Roed, 2009), helps challenge cultural stereotypes and sends an unambiguous message of equality to students (De Vita, 2000)

Working with a group for the purpose of producing an academic outcome, such as a report or a presentation, is essentially a reflection of the principles of the organisation and a wider social context, so students may learn about the basis of power and influence, decision making, and the norms of behaviours and conflicts of interests, all of which are genuine aspects of living and working in society (Reynolds, 1994). It matters to universities to produce competent candidates for the future job market in order to maintain an international reputation, so higher education institutions has been paying increasing attention to developing students' employability in order to survive in a knowledge-driven economy (Hawkrige, 2005).

A report from Higher Education Founding Council of England emphasises the importance of building employability into the curriculum for universities:

Embedding employability into the core of higher education will continue to be a key priority of government, universities and colleges, and employers. This will bring both significant private and public benefit, demonstrating higher education's broader role in contributing to economic growth as well as its vital role in social and cultural development. (HEFCE, 2011, p5)

With a good reputation for graduate employability, higher education institutions will be able to raise their game in the competition from local to international with the benefits of charging higher tuition fees and receiving loans in an economy of increasing costs (Foundation Degree Forward, 2007)

Apart from the benefits the HEIs gain from having better graduates, in a recent British Council report, employers also argued that education providers could contribute more to the development of future students' intercultural communication skills through interventions such as teaching communication skills and providing opportunities for students to gain international experience (British Council & Ipsos, 2013)

### 1.3 Purpose and aims of the study and research questions

The purpose of this study is to fill a gap within the literature by looking into students' experience of multicultural group work, trying to find out what factors might influence students' attitudes towards working in groups. More importantly, it seeks to find out how postgraduate students perceive multicultural group work based on their experience at different times during a one-year master's degree, as well as what do they do to cope with difficulties if they encounter them. A one-year master's degree is also referred as a postgraduate taught course in this research. This particular group was chosen to study owing to the limited time for data collection within the registration period of my full-time doctoral study. A one-year course was the only type of degree course I could fit into my data collection time frame that would allow me to cover the beginning and the end of a course. Secondly, there is larger proportion of international students on postgraduate courses (see Methodology section for details) in this institution.

#### 1.3.1 Research questions

Primary research question:

How and to what extent do postgraduate taught students' attitudes towards mixed-culture group work undergo transformation during the course of their degree studies and what factors are perceived as promoting a more positive mixed-culture group learning experience?

Secondary research questions:

- 1) What differences are discernible between the attitudes of students at the commencement and conclusion of their one-year postgraduate taught course?
- 2) To what factors are perceived attitudinal changes attributable?
- 3) How do students describe the strategies they have developed for accommodating to their peers and working more effectively and productively in mixed-culture groups?

#### 1.4 Significance and contribution of the study

Most of the studies on students' experience of group work and multicultural group work have been conducted by academic staff researching their students. If the lecturers had a role in students' assessment, the objectivity of students' response could have been influenced. My study is coming from the perspective of research conducted "by students, about students and for students". As a researcher who was not a staff member there could be no concern for participants that talking to me would compromise their academic standing with their lecturers, which could be the reason why many of the participants were rather up front and straightforward in talking about their experience, including the negative experience. This feature makes my study unique in voicing students' perspectives on their multicultural group work experience. Another important feature of my study is its strong emphasis on finding out what students choose to do when difficulties occur, which is lacking in the literature. There is very little research that considers students who reported negative attitudes towards working in multicultural groups might at the same time develop problem-solving skills when they had to deal with challenges. Furthermore, whereas previous studies have reported widely on challenges and

difficulties, very little research has addressed students' perceptions about the benefits of working in groups.

As it seems doubtful that only asking about students' attitudes can provide a whole picture of their actual experience, and of skills that they were expected to learn, the design of the present study also aims to fill this gap. The open-ended question at the end of both questionnaires provided a space for students to reflect on and re-evaluate their own experience since the beginning of their master's course. Another strategy I used was incorporating my quantitative data into qualitative interviews, which made this mixed methods study more internally connected. Participants were shown the difference in scores since the beginning of the year on selected relevant constructs and asked to comment on them, which proved to be an effective interview prompt. This is a fairly new approach in researching students' experience of multicultural group work, and also provided more chance for students to reflect on their own attitudes and experience. This study thereby contributes to the body of knowledge on students' experience in an internationalising Higher Education world and provides new insights for practitioners to help them provide a better intercultural learning environment for all students in Higher Education Institutions.

## 1.5 Organisation of the thesis

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 will start to review the literature by discussing why and how group work has been used in Higher Education, including the benefits of working in groups, as well as the difficulties and challenges that occur during the process. Research focusing on multicultural group work and students' experience of working in multicultural groups will then be discussed, followed by the motivation of Higher Education institutions to increase student employability by means of multicultural group work, which has been used as one of the tools to reinforce the internationalisation agenda. The chapter concludes by explaining how the research questions were developed to address the research gap.

Chapter 3, Methodology, begins by explaining the research philosophy behind this study, followed by a detailed explanation of the research design and procedures, including how and when the quantitative and qualitative data were collected, and

attention to ethical considerations. A brief view of the research population and samples is provided, followed by research instruments and their design. The data analysis procedures are also included in this chapter. Factual information on participants and descriptive statistics of the quantitative data will also be presented in this chapter.

Chapter 4, Quantitative Analysis and Discussion, deals firstly with the analysis and discussion of data from Questionnaire Term 1, and then with Questionnaire Term 3, including descriptive statistics of valid constructs, correlation of the constructs and exploration of factors influencing students' attitudes towards their experience of working in groups and multicultural groups. It concludes with a longitudinal comparison of the same respondents' answers in Term 1 and Term 3.

Chapter 5 presents the qualitative analysis and discussion. It includes how students perceive the benefits of multicultural group work from an academic point of view, as well as building interpersonal skills and other employability skills. It then reports on the challenges of working in multicultural groups perceived by students and finally in the last section, the kind of coping strategies students developed when they faced difficulties in working in groups.

Chapter 6, Conclusion, begins with a summary of the quantitative and qualitative separately, followed by a discussion of the quantitative and qualitative findings together regarding postgraduate students' experience of multicultural group work during their one-year master degrees. The chapter continues with by explaining how the study breaks new ground, deals with the limitations of the study, and concludes with some brief recommendations for what practitioners in the HE sector could do to foster a better intercultural learning environment in a Higher Education Institution.

## 2 Literature Review

This review of the literature begins by addressing why and how group work has been used in Higher Education, including the benefits of working in groups, as well as the difficulties and challenges that occur during the process. Research focusing on multicultural group work and students' experience of working in multicultural groups will then be reviewed, followed by the motivation of Higher Education institutions to increase student employability by means of multicultural group work, which has been used as one of the tools to reinforce the internationalisation agenda. The chapter concludes by explaining how the study was influenced by Volet (2001) and how the research questions were developed to address the research gap.

### 2.1 Group work as a collaborative learning activity

#### 2.1.1 What is group work?

Before discussing the key term of this research project – multicultural group work, it is important to look into the idea of group work. Group work has become an increasingly popular teaching method in higher education, which is supported by universities all around the world. A large amount of guidance and suggestions for academic staff and students to take the most advantage of this activity are provided on universities' websites, such as The University of Sydney (2017), University of Birmingham (2017), The University of Auckland (2017), and Harvard University (2017). Researchers have pointed out that “real” learning requires active involvement, so that using group-based learning in higher education is a helpful teaching technique, which also meets the needs of different kinds of students. By participating in group activities, students also learn to develop skills for future employment (Tribe, 1994)

There is not a universal definition of what exactly group work is, however, it is often described as a learning activity:



Group work involves students working collaboratively on set tasks, in or out of the classroom. Group work includes: any learning and teaching tasks or activities that require students to work in groups; any formal assessment tasks that require students to work in groups. (University of Sydney, 2017)

Researchers who have extensively studied learning in groups differentiate the definitions of group tasks and group activities. For example, tasks “specify what the students individually or collectively are asked to think about” or to do and activities “can be viewed as a mix of task, roles, rules and procedure which compromise an educational experience” (Jaques, 2000, p. 98; Jaques & Salmon, 2007, p. 110) They also define small groups as groups of 3-5 people, who will have a better chance to establish closer relationships, agree on aims, and reach cohesion. They would more be likely to have full participation and their roles are shared or rotated. Compared to larger groups, small groups have a limited range of view and interaction can be more intimate (Jaques & Salmon, 2007).

In this research, *group project* and *group work* will both be used interchangeably to refer to group activities, and it will focus on small groups. In order to achieve a coherent and effective activity, tutors are required to provide clear communication of the activity structure, monitoring of the process, be flexible with the rules, and help students to focus on the initial intended outcome (Jaques & Salmon, 2007)

They also identified four categories of general group activities: whole group discussion; structured group discussion; creative thinking methods; games, simulations, role-plays and case studies.

Self-selection, random allocation, pseudo-random allocation and planned allocation are four main categories of forming of student groups (Harrison & Peacock, 2010). However, the fact that students are working together in one group does not indicate they are working together as an effective team.

Some factors that have been identified that would influence the experience and outcome of learning groups are detailed design areas (roles, rules and procedures), running style, cultural context, context, participants’ expectation of tutor’s aims, the prevailing mythology about group work, tutor/participant current personal states, previous experiences organisation of group work and pre-existing relationships with others involved. The detailed design areas and running style are particularly based on tutors’ aims and beliefs (Reynolds, 1994).

### **2.1.2 Why group work is beneficial for university students**

Group work is a significant source of learning because the project itself is a reflection of the principles of the organisations and a wider social context so students may learn about the basis of power and influence, the decision making, the norms of behaviours and conflicts of interests, all of which are genuine aspects of living and working in society (Reynolds, 1994). Group-based learning has two main purposes: skills acquisition and academic aims. The academic objectives include: the ability to understand a text, question a line of argument, follow a lecture, gauge the individual progress on a particular course, or evaluate a course (Tribe, 1994, p. 25). More studies have also pointed out the many academic benefits of group-based activities, for example:

1) Encourage a deep approach to learning; 2) Provide a place where subject material can be fully engaged with processed and integrated into the learner's pre-existing conception of reality; 3) Peer feedback and be given and received in ways more effective than from a tutor. (Thorley & Gregory, 1994)

Through interaction with peers when working in groups, students further enhance skills they had learnt in isolation, such as critical and independent thinking, (McNally, 1994). Studies of student perspectives on the experience of working in groups also confirm the advantages of working in groups in the interest of academic achievement: group-work allows the instructor to develop more comprehensive assignments, and the students are exposed to the viewpoints and behaviour of other group members (Mello, 1993)

Many students also consider that group work is a method that could significantly foster the development of a wider breadth of knowledge through discussion, as well as help their learning in clarification of ideas, and evaluation of others' ideas (Hassanien, 2006).

Apart from the academic benefits, working in groups also demonstrated to help students in developing many transferable skills. In Mello's (1993) study, students reported that working in groups helped them to gain a practical insight into group dynamics and the processes of assignments, develop their interpersonal skills and further prepare them for the real world (Mello, 1993).

Other research has found the skills development advantage of group work: the skills students can practise in the group work process include interpersonal competence such as oral communication, active listening, group leadership, group membership, the ability to examine assumptions and the ability to tolerate ambiguities – all highly valued in employment (Thorley & Gregory, 1994; Tribe, 1994).

Many more transferable skills have also reported in previous research. Working with peers in groups also helps students in developing their skills, including cooperation, improving political consciousness, and leadership. Working in complex group projects also helps to develop students' capability in decision making, problem solving, and conflict resolution. The ability to work effectively and creatively in a team is not only a skill for learning but also skill for employability (Levin, 2004). Team projects provide a unique opportunity to learn integrative skills and enhance students' self-confidence. Students should be able to gain intellectual teamwork skills and emotional teamwork skills. All these skills are among the most most commonly cited employability skills of competent graduates (McNally, 1994).

Intellectual team work skills include the abilities to 1) identify the features, variables, political sensitive aspects and organisational constraints and rewards in a situation; 2) to find solutions by evaluating the need and scope for action; 3) to plan and manage a project; 4) to gather and manage knowledge and expertise; 5) to deploy other forms of learning alongside studying; 6) to identify issues and follow through; 7) to make reasonable predictions and be prepared for different consequences and 8) to apply skills gained from one projects to others. Emotional skills are more focused on developing and managing rapport with other people, negotiating and resolving differences of others' opinions, maintaining morale and dealing with crisis. In detail, these skills involve: effective communication with other team members, consideration and respects, mediation and facilitating, motivation and commitment for work, leadership, decision making, active participation, managerial awareness, be responsible, sensitivity, enthusiasm and be hopeful. Intellectual teamwork skills are possible to teach if teachers provide enough guidance, and the projects are well designed; on the other hand, emotional teamwork skills are only possible to gain through learning experience by students' own participation (Levin, 2004).

Teams formed by members from a single culture might experience a clash of personalities, and teams formed by students from different cultures are more likely to encounter misunderstandings. Individualism versus collectivism; tolerance of uncertainty; face and gender issues and codes of behaviour are all contributing to possible miscommunication easily. For example, punctuality, personal space and interrupting conversation are all causes for arguments (Levin, 2004).

Group projects quite often require students to work together extensively over a period time to research questions or problems and report their findings in the form of oral presentations or/and as written reports. This links university education to the world of work, because students will work as part of a team that needs to take advantage of the different strengths and skills of the team members in order to succeed. This requires negotiation, problem solving, coordination and planning (Burnapp, 2009).

### **2.1.3 Why it is important to look at attitudes?**

If students hold negative attitudes toward multicultural group work, it is likely to have impact on their own motivation and behaviour when working in groups with other students, and their negative attitudes might result in other students also suffer from a negative working environment, which could possibly lead to more negative attitudes. Therefore, it is important to find out what factors affect students' attitudes towards working in groups.

The students who received a satisfactory final mark have more positive attitudes, however, that is not the only predictor of positive attitudes. Research points out that students' attitudes towards teamwork are closely influenced by the process of working together as well as the final project grades. A reasonable workload for the group work project, having time in class to discuss the project work, use of peer evaluations, and absence of the "free-rider" problem are also significant predictors of students having more positive attitudes towards working in groups (Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003)

It was found in research that there are many factors that can influence if students work together as an effective team. These factors include: mature communication, accountable interdependence, psychological safety, have a common purpose and

have a clear understanding of what their role is when working in teams. If the students can show and develop these skills and characteristics above, their teams are likely to be effective, and their experience of effective teamwork would contribute to them having a positive attitudes towards working in groups in the future (Ruiz Ulloa & Adams, 2004)

Many students have negative attitudes toward group work because doing a group work requires additional time for meetings for discussing and negotiating issues about the content of the group project, it also requires students to spend time coordinate with other group members to arrange the meeting time and location. Some students consider this process as cost of their time and productivity (McLaughlin & Fennick, 1987; Yamane, 1996).

Students' negative attitudes towards multicultural group work was associated with these following factors: their own previous bad group work experience; coordinating among group members such as arranging meetings; their concerns over others dragging their score down and being forced to work with unfamiliar people they did not choose by themselves (Reid & Garson, 2017).

## 2.2 From group work to multicultural group work: A changing role

### 2.2.1 What is multicultural group work?

In section 1.2.2, a description of the learning activities that are considered to be multicultural group work for this research was provided. But how are the learning activities defined as MGW in section 1.2.2 different from the group work discussed in section 2.1.1? One very obvious difference between multicultural group work and group work is the nationalities of group members. The transition from GW to MGW starts from the moment when the lecturer decides each group should be formed of members from two or more different countries. In other words, the task of multicultural group work is requiring mixed-nationality groups to complete. On the surface level, this is just mixing people of different nationalities, but to what extent would this change of group members influence the interaction within a group? In order to discuss this question, it is important to look at what culture is

and what is its relation to an individual's nationality. Geertz (1973) compares culture to "webs of significance":

Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz, 1973, p. 5)

Building on Geertz' definition, Schneider and Barsoux (2003) described culture as "systems of shared meaning or understanding, which drive or explain the behaviours observed" (p. 22).

The studies of culture vary across disciplines and each discipline has its own theories and frameworks to view culture. In cross-cultural and social psychology, researchers such as Hofstede (2001) and Schwartz (1990) mainly focus on fundamental values of cultures and hoping to identify influential dimensions of culture for the purpose to comparing cultures (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). In Hofstede's (2001) framework, five dimensions are proposed of country-level cultural variables: 1) individualism/collectivism; 2) high power distance/low power distance; 3) masculinity/femininity; 4) high uncertainty avoidance/low uncertainty avoidance and 5) long term orientation/short term orientation. In Schwartz's (1990) framework, 10 individual value constructs were established to explain an individual's qualities: power, achievement, hedonism, stimulation, self-direction, universalism, benevolence, tradition, conformity and security (Spencer-Oatey, 2007). Hofstede's framework is designed to pinpoint national cultures on a fixed scale. These dimensions of culture are extensively used in the business literature but also criticised for methodological weaknesses and the notion of "national cultural social causality" (McSweeney, 2002, p. 109). Schwartz's individual values have been found to be useful in explaining work-related issues in international business and management research, although this is a framework mostly known in the field of psychology (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009). Other examples of frameworks in international business studies that address differences in cultures are Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner's work and the GLOBE project (House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002). Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner explain that their work started from the purpose of resolving conflicts, so they established a range of cultural dimensions to explain differences in behaviour (Hampden-Turner & Trompenaars, 1997, 2008). The GLOBE project is more focused on leadership (House, Javidan, Hanges, & Dorfman, 2002). There are also models of

culture in applied linguistics with a main focus on communication and interaction, such as Holliday's work on viewing culture as a practice (Holliday, 2010) and Liddicoat's work on viewing communication as "culturally contexted practice" (Liddicoat, 2009).

Anthropologists have also discussed culture and cultural difference widely. For example, Hall (1976) explains cultural difference from three dimensions: monochronic time (M-time)/polychronic time (P-time); low-context communication/high-context communication; and the use of personal space. Hall (1976) also developed the iceberg analogy of culture, which conceptualises culture as visible/invisible layers. The surface layer (above the water line) culture is behaviour, that is, what can be observed; the underlying layers are beliefs and values; thought patterns are the rationale behind the behaviours that cannot be physically seen (Hall, 1976). This model suggests that it is not only important to pay attention to people's communication, interactions and behaviours, but it is also important to understand the underpinning thoughts and beliefs driving those behaviours that can be observed.

Apart from national culture, culture is also studied in its relation to social groups. Depending on an individual's association with one or more social groups, religious culture, organisational culture, professional culture, and culture as community of practice in each group will have an influence on this person's thoughts, values and behaviours at different levels (Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009).

Drawing on the above literature on different layers of culture and different ways of looking at culture, multicultural group work could be studied according to its context – where MGW happens, process – how MGW is completed, and product – the outcome of MGW. Firstly, MGW in Higher Education usually happens in an English speaking HEI that has students from different countries. Which country this institution is located in, its national culture and education policy, and the institution's education strategy would have an impact on the educational aims of MGW on a broader level. For example, if the HEI has a strategy on internationalisation and producing global graduates, then it is likely to put more effort and resources into establishing support for a multicultural learning

environment compared to a HEI that focuses more on providing vocational courses to local citizens.

Secondly, which discipline and course this MGW is used in, lecturers' understanding of MGW's use and purpose, and lecturers' own national cultural background and international experience would influence the task design. For example, an MGW designed for a management class is likely to be different from a MGW designed for plant science lab work.

Thirdly, where students come from, their own national, professional, religious and educational background would influence how each student understands the task, what they think are expected to accomplish in this MGW, and what they expect from their peers when working on the task.

Last but not least, how the MGW would be evaluated also is influenced by departmental and institutional policy, as well as the lecturers' preference regarding the end product, such as presentations and written reports, or how much assessment weighting the MGW carries.

To conclude, what can be observed to differentiate MGW from GW is the nationalities of group members, but it has deep level differences in people's interactions depending on group members' previous experience and background, including but not exclusive to their national, professional, religious and educational background. Therefore, in this research, two factors – students' nationalities and first languages – will be explored with a quantitative approach, and students' professional and educational background will be explored more with a qualitative approach. The two approaches will be combined to explore students' perspectives on MGW; how the mixed-methods approach is used in this study will be discussed in the Methodology section.

### **2.2.2 How can multicultural group work benefit students?**

Apart from the benefits of group work that have been mentioned in the above section, multicultural group work also brings the element of diversity into the experience of students working in groups.



Working in multicultural groups helps students to develop skills such as “managing diversity and cultivating tolerance; managing different perceptions and expectations across variables such as culture and degree expectations; managing conflict and preparing for the world of paid employment” (Caspersz, Skene, & Wu, 2002, p. 5). There are further benefits to working in groups, multicultural group work also benefits students in the following ways:

1. prepare students to function in an international and intercultural context (Knight & De Wit, 1995)
2. enhance all students' understanding and appreciation of other cultures (Volet & Ang, 1998)
3. challenge cultural stereotypes and send an unambiguous message of equality to students (De Vita, 2000)

It was reported in the literature that students particularly appreciated working in multicultural groups as a good practice for preparing them for employment in a multinational organisation and in the global world (Montgomery, 2009; Robinson, 2006). It has also been pointed out that successful multicultural group work was actually rather demanding on group members, because they would have to display many intercultural awareness, skills and knowledge in order for the group to function well. These features include: 1) having certain attitudes such as respecting other people's culture; 2) personality traits such as patience and openness; 3) skills such as building team-work or integration; and 4) knowledge relating to understanding the culture of others (Woods, Barker, & Hibbins, 2011).

Students' multicultural experience also plays a significant role when it comes to deciding whether they should join a mixed group or not – students who had a multilingual background are more positive to work in mixed the groups than those were not (Summers & Volet, 2008). International students, have a better appreciation of multicultural group work as they think it provides them with a social network to know more people, they particularly value it at the early stages of their studies when they did not know many people at the university (Melles, 2003). Some international students also reported that they value group work on their courses as an opportunity to enhance their English language skills (Li and Campbell, 2008). By participating in mixed-culture groups, students develop skills of working with different people when experiencing different cultures, such as working around

other's schedules and compromising in meeting times (Liu and Dall'Alba, 2012). Some students even find it enjoyable to work in mixed-culture groups as they consider it a good chance to meet new people, made new friends and experience new cultures. They enjoy discussing the cultural experience with group members and sharing the research ideas and findings with one another (Liu and Dall'Alba, 2012).

Spencer-Oatey and Dauber (2016) summarised the benefits of multicultural group work's benefits into five categories based on their review of Montgomery's (2009) and Sweeney, Weaven, and Herington (2008)'s work: self-awareness; new ideas and learning practices; interaction skills; attitudes and friendships. Table 2.1 shows the details:

Table 2-01: Benefits of multicultural group work: Adapted from Montgomery (2009); Spencer-Oatey & Dauber (2016) and Sweeney et al. (2008)

Self-awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses</li> <li>▪ Personal growth</li> <li>▪ Learning about self and ability to lead a group</li> </ul>
New ideas and learning practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Unique perspectives on issues</li> <li>▪ Deep content learning</li> <li>▪ Better learning practices (e.g. time management, critical evaluation and involvement)</li> <li>▪ Different perspectives essential for some subjects (e.g. international business)</li> </ul>
Interaction skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How to compromise</li> <li>▪ Adept at working with strangers, people with a different mindset</li> <li>▪ More confident and comfortable, especially in presenting own view</li> </ul>
Attitudes:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Change in attitudes towards others</li> <li>▪ Reduction in prejudices</li> </ul>
Friendships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Opportunity to make great friends</li> </ul>

### 2.2.3 Multicultural group work: Students' attitudes and challenges

The multicultural group work experience happens due to internationalisation of the curriculum at the level of student (Leask, 2005). Group work is a very helpful tool to develop students' recognition or intercultural values and build intercultural relationships as it is a unique platform that enables student to interact and share knowledge and experiences (Edmead, 2012; Osmond & Roed, 2009).

The challenges in multicultural group works reported in the literature roughly cover five broader categories: language and communication, attitudes and engagement,

composition of group members, group management and conflict management (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2016).

In research conducted with home and international students in Australia, these following difficulties were reported by students as the most challenging part of working in multicultural group work: different English accents, students' use of mother tongue, negative stereotypes and ethnocentric views, cultural–emotional connectedness and practicalities, such as local students and international students' different motivation and commitment to the course (Volet & Ang, 1998, 2012). In research conducted in the business school of one UK university, these following challenges were reported by students as affecting their group work experience most, and the challenges are ranked in a descending order:

- 1) Unequal English language skills
- 2) Quietness or silence
- 3) Leadership or role ambiguity
- 4) Communication issues
- 5) Conflict
- 6) Unequal commitment to the group
- 7) Time keeping or punctuality
- 8) Free riders or lack of participation
- 9) Differing expectations of groups
- 10) Over-talking or interrupting; Chinese students' cultural values;  
Chinese students' use of Mandarin in class

(Turner, 2009)

Some other challenges that are more related to cultural difference were also reported in the literature. These following aspects are affecting most of the students: free riding; insufficient language skills; communication style; low motivation; ineffective group management; group conflicts; different disciplinary backgrounds; negative attitudes towards others; heterogeneous composition; differences in academic attitudes; differences in ambitions; and culturally different styles of decision-making and problem-solving. However, the perceptions of challenges in multicultural student group work differed from cultural groups, which could be a result of some conflicts and misunderstanding caused by culturally different expectations with respect to learning in groups and the behavioural motives of others (Popov et al., 2012).

When students were divided in to different regional groups as UK, EEA (excl.UK), China and Other overseas students, difference was found in their attitudes towards

multicultural group work. It was found that Chinese students found multicultural group work somewhat more challenging than students from the other national/regional clusters; and UK students, which in this study were home students, felt significantly less positive than those from other national/regional clusters about how multicultural group work could enrich their experience (Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2016).

Research also found there were many negative stereotypes hold by both home and international students towards each other. Home students consider international students as: 1) have poor English skills; 2) so quiet that not sure they can participate in the discussion; 3) not task-focused; 4) cannot work individual 5) too dependent on help from home students; 6) slow to complete tasks; and 7) in need of leadership and direction (Turner, 2009). On the other hand, international students complained about home students being: 1) dominating the group; 2) controlling and opinionated; 3) always assume leadership; 4) very direct; 5) confrontational or aggressive; 6) intolerant of L2 English speakers; 7) talk animatedly; 8) show-offs who are not always right; 9) difficult to get close to; 10) will not socialize; 11) work and talk too fast; 12) impatient; and 13) unsupportive of the group (Turner, 2009). Domestic students (or first-language students) tend to see students for whom English is a second language (L2) as being less capable than they themselves are. They often “tacitly bypass” (Leki, 2001, p. 48) L2 students at the group formation stage and treat them as “novices, incompetents or apprentices”, while they see themselves as “experts, masters or at least the more senior members of the community of practice” (Leki, 2001, p. 60).

The assessment of the group process also played an important role in students’ overall experience: “the effects of judgements made on individuals’ careers, as well as the evaluation of their worth by themselves or by others, ensures that assessment is experienced by students as being of considerable significance” (Reynolds & Trehan, 2000, p. 268). Other research also pointed out that the discussion was dominated by home students (particularly males), with limited input from international students. The interactions were much more equal in groups that only had international students. However, the male home students’ participation and their contribution was not positively correlate after an analysis of influence on group decisions (in terms of proportion of suggestions accepted by the group),

despite their dominance in discussion, their ideas were not as much accepted in the decision-making progress (Cotton, George, & Joyner, 2013). In research done on multicultural groups in workplace, ethnically minorities were also perceived to contribute less to decision-making of the group. However, after an increase of constructive conflicts was introduced to the groups, not only they managed to make more accurate and important assumptions regarding their work, the minorities in the group had significant improvement in their performance and reactions in the group decision-making process (Kirchmeyer & Cohen, 1992). The diversity was also reported to have double effect on multicultural teams in workplace: it largely increased the creativity, however, the efficiency of monocultural teams was much higher (DiStefano & Maznevski, 2000).

Li and Campbell's (2008) research also showed evidence that even though group discussion was valued, group assessments with shared grades were unpopular. This attitude can lead to tensions developing later, as a poor group mark can lead to L2 students being blamed for dragging the home students' mark down. However, studies have indicated that the performance of culturally mixed groups is more of a reflection of the ability of the most able group member, rather than a reflection of the average ability of the group members or the ability of the least capable member of the group. Contrary to domestic students' assumptions – that their marks would be dragged down by international students – assessed multicultural group work has a synergistic and positive effect on students' individual marks, on average (De Vita, 2002).

Summers and Volet's (2008) investigation of students' attitudes towards culturally mixed group work indicates that those who have worked in mixed groups have more positive attitudes towards multicultural group work than those who have not, and local students are more likely to have negative pre-task attitudes, resulting in their self-selection into monocultural groups. Home students' preference for working in their own cultural group can lead to international students having less of a chance to work in multicultural groups, and local students' negative attitudes towards working with people from other cultures may become even worse as they continue through their time at university (Strauss & Young, 2011; Volet & Ang, 1998). In contrast, international students are more likely to have more positive thoughts towards multicultural group projects (Strauss et al., 2011; Summers & Volet, 2008).

Apart from language, pragmatism and negative stereotypes towards one another, cultural-emotional connectedness has also been identified as a reason that both home students and international students prefer to work with co-national students (Volet & Ang, 1998). Furthermore, the uncertainty created by multicultural group work has been known to produce different levels of anxiety, which plays an important role in students' instinct of preferring to work with people from similar cultural backgrounds (Strauss et al., 2011).

Even though working in multicultural groups would appear to be beneficial for students' personal development, it is unrealistic to expect all these young people to have the foresight to challenge themselves to work with people from other backgrounds (Hinds, Carley, Krackhardt, & Wholey, 2000; Strauss et al., 2011). Educators, therefore, have an important role to play in encouraging students to break out of their comfort zone and, by allocating students into mixed cultural groups for their group work, can be very influential in helping ensure that students have a more positive experience at university. Therefore, while self-selection is a popular method of group selection, groups selected by lecturers in such a way that promotes multicultural interaction will likely result in a more positive learning experience (Hernandez, 2002) and, importantly, give students in these groups the kind of intercultural interaction they are likely to experience as graduates in the workplace later in life (Hansen, 2006).

No amount of understanding of group behaviour is sufficient for successful participation in groups unless each person in the group has the capacity to communicate effectively. It is through communication that people achieve an understanding of one another and are thus able to influence, and be influenced by others. Only if there is a predisposition to accept and accommodate others will honest communication take place – and this implies a degree of trust and openness between participants. Without these, mutual understanding and influences are liable to distortion: co-operation is unlikely. (Jaques, 2000, p. 61)

In order to support students in continuing to attempt to work together more effectively, institutions should provide language and presentation skills support for international students, and inform students about the benefits of intercultural interactions. Students should receive more explicit information about the purposes of group work, enough time for project and internationalised learning material (Osmond & Roed, 2009). Academic staff should also attempt to foster a better intercultural learning environment for the students to work in multicultural groups, such as adjusting the forming of the group, monitoring over the working process,

preparing students for the difficulties ahead and helping students to make sense of the intercultural encounters (De Vita, Carroll, & Ryan, 2005). It is pointed out in research some more effective ways that academic staff could help to improve the multicultural group work experience for students. For example, by giving students basic information about cultural differences and communication preferences prior to engaging in group work, as well as giving time to reflect on their own preferences and behaviours after the group work, students would have more effective interactions (Reid & Garson, 2017).

Comparing the negative stereotypes that home and international student hold against each other, it seems like many of the negative stereotypes are results from culturally different speaking and working styles. For example, if the students were introduced to the linguistics knowledge ‘turn-taking’, and tried to understand signals of others waiting for a chance to speak rather interrupting each other, their situation of ‘one talk too fast, the other is too quiet’ could be improved.

#### **2.2.4 How does English ability affect international students’ academic life?**

English, the lingua franca in globalisation and the language chosen in this international education context, also plays a significant role in the driving international students to study in English speaking countries and acts as a tool of imposing the western ways of thinking (Leask, 2009). It is necessary for HEIs to rethink the role and standard of English that is used in this academic context as the student body and staff body is internationalising because International English language tests such as IELTS and TOEFL are used mostly in Higher Education Institutions as language ability quality control tools, which are designed only on the base of English as spoken in inner-circle countries (Crichton & Murray, 2014). One of the key issues arising from the literature on culture and group work is the English language ability (Leki, 2001).

There has been research that argues that the role of English is marginalised in current internationalisation literatures, and it is crucial to discuss English as the academic lingua franca if HEIs are claiming to deliver an international education to all the international students. University students from native English speaking countries are less willing to learn foreign languages as they become increasing aware of English being the international lingua franca in global academic context.

However, what is missing in their understanding is the meaning of English as a lingua franca, which is a fact that the English that is being discussed here is not the English they learned and used to (Jenkins, 2014).

Language ability also impacts on the general experience and overall adjustment or adaptation of international students. English fluency, social support satisfaction, and social connectedness are all predictors of acculturative stress affecting international students' experience in universities (Yeh & Inose, 2003). It was also found in research of international students that their language self-confidence plays a pivotal role in mediating the relations between host cultural contact and self-construal, as well as psychological adjustment and sociocultural difficulty (Yang, Noels, & Saumure, 2006).

Among the various important factors that impact on international students' experience, Communication is particularly challenging for international students in integrating with the wider community in the university, because it has to be clear, appropriate and unambiguous, as the information has to be filtered through a student's home culture (Colvin & Jaffar, 2007).

The language development is a positive factor associated with sojourner adjustment. There are four positive factors and two negative ones influencing students' adjustment in total and the other three positive ones are social interaction with host nationals; cultural understanding and participation; and host culture identification. The two negative factors are social interaction with co-nationals, homesickness/feeling out of place. (Pedersen, Neighbors, Larimer, & Lee, 2011). Language proficiency has been proved to be an important variable in the development of international students' friendship circles.

International students' friendship circles are positively associated with the following factors: their personality, knowledge of the host country, attitudes about forming friendships with host nationals and co-nationals, their communication skills (language proficiency), and their social environmental context (Ying, 2002).

Spoken English skills and openness of communication are also identified as factors that significantly influence the development of intercultural friendship (Kudo & Simkin, 2003). It is important to look at the how English, especially the spoken



English that is associated with verbal communication skills, has such an important influence on international students' general living abroad experience. If they struggle with expressing themselves effectively during daily life, it could only be much more challenging for them when they are expected to have intense intellectual knowledge exchanges in a group discussion. Also, if their English speaking skills are affecting their adjustment into a new culture, their academic ability might be affected if they did not feel at ease living in a different country. Universities should invest more in helping international students develop their communication skills as well as promoting awareness among home students that the quietness of international students is not necessarily a sign of lack of knowledge but a sign of struggling with communication.

## 2.3 Why it matters to HEIs to provide a better intercultural learning environment for students

### **2.3.1 Changing to survive in globalisation: motivations for Higher Education Institutions to improve student employability**

Universities change in response to the demands of the society's dominant institutions (Jarvis, 2013). The first driver of the changes in Higher Education is a transition to a knowledge-based economy. Eighty per cent of a company's value comes from its own unique knowledge of services, markets, relationships, reputation and brand, on other words, intangibles or soft knowledge (Hutton, 2007). The wealth production is shifting from productivity and efficiency to talent innovated services and higher valued goods, hence the transformation of the economy – all of these changes are a result of knowledge being the foundation of economic, social and political power, which has led to positioning higher education- “a provider of human capital through education and training, a primary source of new knowledge and knowledge /technology transfer, and a beacon for international investment and talent- at the centre of policy making” (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 6).

A trend of academic capitalism has become increasingly popular- it values knowledge privatisation and profit of institutions, inventor faculty, and corporations has gained more focus than the public. Public interest in science is shifting toward

a strong knowledge economy; in other words, people pay more attention to what makes more profit rather than benefits of the general public. Knowledge is considered as a private good and it is valued as the profit it generates when these high-technology products flow through global markets. (Slaughter and Rhoades, 2004). “Academic research is no longer solely the pursuit of individual intellectual curiosity but is driven in large measure by national funding priorities which are tied to strategies of economic growth and competitiveness” (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 12). Academic researchers are obligated to disclose discoveries to their institutions, which are valued because it leads to high-technology products for a knowledge economy (Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004).

A rising costs of higher education seems more like a natural outcome rather than breaking news under these circumstances. Tuition fees reflect not just the actual costs of institution but also supply and demand: the expensive fee and relocation costs for students to study at universities have made students and their parents become customers who assess institutions and regard those educational programmes as an opportunity-cost (Hazelkorn, 2011). They require more consumer type of information by relying on guidebooks or comparative or benchmarking data which become increasingly on a global scale and accessible online. These rankings provide students with criteria of student satisfaction surveys of teaching and academic endeavour, comparison of employability and potential salaries and reviews on the quality of student experience and campus life (Hazelkorn, 2011). Because education and graduate outcomes and lifestyle are strongly correlated with higher qualifications and career opportunities, students (and their parents) have become savvy consumers. In this case, the international/national rankings are also transforming and reshaping Higher Education.

“Rankings are a manifestation of what has become known as the worldwide ‘battle for excellence’, and are perceived and used to determine the status of individual institutions, assess the quality and performance of the higher education system and gauge global competitiveness”, and “rankings are inevitable outcome and metaphor for the intensification of global competition, around which, higher education as both the progenitor of human capital and knowledge has become fulcrum around which

geo-political battles for a greater share of global market are being fought” (Hazelkorn, 2011, p. 11).

Nation states and supranational entities (e.g. the EU) have adapted new strategies for developing national competitive advantage by using international rankings; HE institutions has transformed their organisational and institutional culture and behaviour in order to move up in rankings for surviving this international market; and students and faculty are using rankings as self and peer perceptions of the status system (Hazelkorn, 2011).

Higher education has become a market-determined as globalisation has brought a huge wave of change to societies, economies and policies across the world, so Higher education systems is also transformed by globalisation, which is part of “the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness” (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, & Perraton, 2000, p. 2). Apart from the political and economic influence globalisation itself brings to this global mobility plate, it also creates a context of marketisation discourse (Caruana & Spurling, 2007), which generates an increasing pressure for higher education institutes to boost up their profile and branding in order to share a bigger piece of cake of the international students’ market for the benefits of a larger amount of tuition fees that those students’ paying (Caruana & Hanstock, 2003; Caruana & Spurling, 2007; De Vita & Case, 2003), as well as establish the status of the particular language chosen in this discourse (Caruana & Spurling, 2007; De Vita & Case, 2003).

Governments and globally active HEIs are pursuing two related objectives: 1) maximizing “capacity and performance within the global landscape”; and 2) optimizing the “benefits of global flows, linkages and offshore operations back home in the national and local settings” (Marginson & Van der Wende, 2007, p. 17).

International growth in demand of higher education and the growth in demand of university research are another two important drivers of change in university in this century. The allocation of public resources will not be increased under the current circumstances, even though relevant policy-makers, Higher Education institutions, corporations and other stakeholders will make their own changes to adapt to the new dynamics of university. As a result, the university adjusts itself via different

strategies in order to survive the market: internationalisation of universities; offshore campuses; the combination of information technologies and telecommunications technology; and consortia and strategic alliances with other universities (Blight, Davis, & Olsen, 2000).

Higher education institutions also pay increasing attention to developing students' employability in order to survive in a knowledge-driven economy (Hawkrigde, 2005). Different stakeholders in Higher Education will benefit from embedding employability into the university curriculum: "embedding employability into the core of higher education will continue to be a key priority of government, universities and colleges, and employers. This will bring both significant private and public benefit, demonstrating higher education's broader role in contributing to economic growth as well as its vital role in social and cultural development" (HEFCE 2011, p5).

With a good reputation for graduate employability, which has an impact on student and staff's daily learning and working, Higher Education Institutions will be able to raise their game in the competition from locally to internationally with the benefits of charging higher tuition fees and receiving loans in an economy of increasing costs. Large numbers of university research programmes and knowledge transfer projects rely on sponsorships from employers, and it is increasingly popular for HEIs to "have business development units and entrepreneurial departments that work proactively with employers to develop in-company programmes, intensive post-graduate courses and continuing professional development programmes" (Foundation Degree Forward, 2007, p. 5) as well as an increase in customised undergraduate degree programmes (Foundation Degree Forward, 2007).

A report from Higher Education Funding Council for England identified five main ways HEI can be seen to engage with employers and their local communities:

- 1) through graduate recruitment (as a supplier of highly skilled labour);
- 2) as a source of labour demand (many HEIs are amongst the largest employers in their localities);
- 3) as a source of lifelong learning (through continuous professional development and training (CPD));

- 4) as a supplier of research and development (R&D), and the provision of support for the knowledge economy;
- 5) as a key player in a variety of economic development related networks and partnerships (typically publicly funded through the UK/EU), and an important means of building new partnerships.

(Bolden, Connor, Duquemin, Hirsh, & Petrov, 2009)

The benefits the HEI again from collaborating with employers, education providers could contribute more to the development of future students' intercultural communication skills through interventions such as teaching communication skills and providing opportunities for students to gain international experience (British Council, Ipsos, & Booz Allen Hamilton, 2013), which benefits students and employers in long term.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education in the UK has provided very specific standard on characteristics of masters' degree graduates, so that universities' master programmes would have to fulfil these education expectations:

Master's graduates are diverse, with wide-ranging strengths and abilities. This is a reflection of the diversity of master's programmes available as well as students' different aspirations, motivations, learning needs and personal circumstances. Nonetheless, all master's degree graduates have in-depth and advanced knowledge and understanding of their subject and/or profession, informed by current practice, scholarship and research. This will include a critical awareness of current issues and developments in the subject and/or profession; critical skills; knowledge of professional responsibility, integrity and ethics; and the ability to reflect on their own progress as a learner... Graduates of all types of master's degrees are equipped to enter a variety of types of employment (either subject-specific or generalist) or to continue academic study at a higher level, for example a doctorate (provided that they meet the necessary entry requirements). (QAA, 2015)

### **2.3.2 Student employability and its relation to intercultural competence**

The definition of employability is “a set of achievements, - skills, understandings and personal attributes – that make graduates more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy” (HEA, 2012).

Popular skills they employers look for in graduate are: effective learning skill, self-awareness, networking and negotiation skills, transferable skills, self-confidence, interpersonal skills, team-working ability, decision-making skills and the capacity to cope with uncertainty (Knight & Yorke, 2004).

Employees who are able to work effectively across cultures are perceived as bringing real business value to their organisations. This is especially true of those with knowledge of foreign languages and the intercultural communication skills that enable them to understand different cultural contexts and viewpoints, as well as being able to demonstrate respect for others. Increasingly, employers look for intercultural skills in job candidates either through active screening or observation of their behaviours in the selecting process. Furthermore, some provide relevant training that encourages their staff to develop intercultural skills (British Council et al., 2013).

### **2.3.3 Supporting students' learning experience: Academic staff and university's roles**

Universities and academic staff should promote and engage students with intercultural learning opportunities in a more mindful and strategic way (Leask, 2010). Lecturers' own intercultural competence influences students' motivation, as they are crucial characters in internationalising classrooms. It is necessary for academic staff to actively promote intercultural group work as well as providing sufficient support, especially in the first year for undergraduate students when there is less academic pressure. Workshops and training are on demand for developing lecturers' intercultural awareness and their skills in facilitating internationalised classrooms (Harrison & Peacock, 2010) "Institutions and educators interested in genuine internationalisation of higher education can create curricula spaces which foster intercultural learning through multicultural groupwork" (De Vita et al., 2005, p. 76). In order to develop international and intercultural perspectives in students, it is important for the academic staff to be efficient intercultural learners themselves as teachers' own intercultural awareness change the way they think about what and how they teach the knowledge (Leask, 2013), this is the internationalisation of the curriculum at level of the teacher, as teacher preparation and knowledge is a curial factor in this process (Leask, 2005).

With the growing number of international students appearing on campus, universities have started to pay much more attention to their adjustment and adaptation in the host country, as well as to promote the idea of integration to the home students to increase their flexibility and openness to this global village.

Intercultural contact and social integration between home and international students should be encouraged in the best interests of all students. With international students living on campus, a unique social platform is created for all students to understand and appreciate the richness of other cultures. The expectations of well-educated university students being interculturally competent have greatly increased throughout the years, so that the development of intercultural competence should become one of the major aims of the internationalisation of higher education (Volet & Ang, 1998).

A growing number of in-depth studies about the integration support programmes provided by universities have appeared in the past decade. A study was conducted to explore the effect of support for continuing social integration for international students delivered by Central Queensland University Sydney. When the students arrive on campus, they are scheduled into an orientation programme, with social activities such as lunch with staff and a city bus tour. The local community is also invited to participate in the programme: community police officers and health fund representatives are invited as external guest speakers. During term time, other social integration activities are also scheduled, including sporting activities, parties, cultural events, community activities, communication activities, work-related activities and welfare activities. Besides the above events, the international students are strongly encouraged to join the campus Environmental Committee, the Academic-student Liaison Group and the Occupational Health and Safety Committee, where are accessible platforms for meeting other students and staff, which is both beneficial for the university to have a contribution from the students, as well as for the students to enhance their sense of belonging to the campus. The results show that these activities are very effective in improving the contact between international students and the staff as well as the experience of cultural contacts (Owens & Loomes, 2010).

However, having intercultural contact does not spontaneously lead to the development of friendships between home and international students. There has been research done on universities' programmes for promoting integration between home students and international students. Local cultural knowledge was delivered to the international students, and they were assigned to home students, regarding of issues of interests and experience, for regular contact. The research found that no

lasting friendships were built through the programme, even though the home students have the motivation to learn about other cultures and language and international students have the motivation to improve their English and acquire more local knowledge. The researchers claim that this failure was due to the different views of the home and international students: the home students were trying to get to know as many people as they could while the international students were looking for stable friendships (Gresham & Clayton, 2011). If the social programme could not effectively facilitate the interaction between home students and international students, maybe there should be more emphasis on the academic platform, to invest more in promoting and facilitating a better intercultural learning environment, so that students can fulfil their different expectations of interacting with people from other cultures through working with as many multicultural groups as they can.

The fundamental idea of integration begins with the ideal of international students mixing with home students. However, for some students, instead of developing friendships with the host national students, they become friends with international students from other countries. Even though the home students are missing from this picture, the mixture of international students from different countries should be also considered as integration, as their experience includes every single aspect of intercultural competence. Montgomery (2010)'s research international students' lives focuses on integration issues. She points out that the prior purpose of the international students is leaning how to be academically successful and the students also learn how to live in the new cultural context while they are learning to be good students. She also claims that the relationship between international students and home students appears to be secondary to the friendships formed in international student groups. The research also touches on the issue of the differences between international students and home students. As international students often choose to stay on campus while many home students prefer to live in private housing and explore the town life, geographical and physical distances appeared between the international and home students, which is the difference between on-campus and off-campus student life. Shared interests have an important impact on the forming of their relationships as well. The stronger friendships among international students might also result from the powerful common experiences of moving to a new culture (Montgomery, 2010).



## 2.4 Volet's research on culturally mixed group work and its impact on my research

### 2.4.1 The rationale behind my interest in Volet's research

In search of literature on multicultural group work, I came across more than 10 articles and book chapters directly addressing challenges and issues around group work in Higher Education, published by Volet and her research associates. No other scholars have more publications on this topic, and she has also done extensive research on international students' experience and students' learning motivation, therefore it is a natural step to consider what she has reported regarding my research topic.

As discussed in other sections of my literature review, multicultural group work in Higher Education is a by-product of global mobility and internationalisation of Higher Education Institution. In Volet's publication, a significant amount of discussion was attributed to the issues around internationalisation of Higher Education, and in her research with Summers in 2008, they discussed the educational and social goals of this policy in their research: Promoting critical awareness of the culture-specific, subjective nature of knowledge (Volet 2004); countering out group prejudice (Nesdale & Todd, 2000); and fostering students' development of intercultural competence (Summers & Volet, 2008, p. 357). These educational and social goals are a result of the pressure to equip students to function effectively in different cultural contexts because university graduates are facing a society that international trading and culturally diverse teams are becoming increasingly prevalent (Ledwith & Seymour, 2001) therefore encouraging multicultural group work could be contributing in achieving these education goals (Summers & Volet, 2008)

Apart from relating multicultural group work with its' context, Volet and her research associates also developed a survey specifically for researching group work- Students' Appraisals of Group Assignment, which has been used repeatedly in her research. It is often referred as the SAGA instrument, which has been reported in ten research articles and book chapters. Before further discussion of the instruments, it is important to note that there were two versions of the SAGA

instrument: The Students' Appraisals of Group Assignments (SAGA) instrument and Students' Appraisals of a specific Group Assignment. They are referred as the Contextualised-SAGA instrument and the General-SAGA.

The Contextualised-SAGA instrument is a further development of the General-SAGA, its development was in light of recent moves in educational psychology research to move away from trait-type research and focus more on situation-specific learning situations" (Volet, 2014). The aim of the Contextualised-SAGA is therefore to measure students' appraisals of a specific group assignment that they are just about to undertake (task onset), and then their appraisals of that same assignment at the end (task offset).

The Students' Appraisals of Group Assignments (SAGA) (Volet, 2001) is based on principles of Rasch measurement (Andrich, 1978), which consists of six constructs, each designed to measure a different dimension of students' appraisals of group assignments. Respondents indicate their level of agreement with each item statement on a 4-point Likert scale ('strongly disagree' = 1, 'disagree' = 2, 'agree' = 3, 'strongly agree' = 4). The six contextualised scales measure students' appraisals of the Cognitive benefits, Motivating influence, Group assessment component, Affect, Management and Interpersonal aspects of a specific group assignment. The Contextualised-SAGA also contains six constructs (5 items each), which aims at eliciting students' appraisals of the Cognitive Benefits, Motivating Influence, Group Assessment, Affect, Management, and Interpersonal dimensions of their current assignment (thus contextualised to that task) (Kimmel and Volet, 2010). Although the constructs of the Contextualised-SAGA has the same names of those in the General-SAGA, the items in the Contextualised-SAGA were totally re-written (no one-to-one match) to develop a task-context sensitive instrument that would be suitable to measure change in appraisals over the duration of a group assignment (Kimmel and Volet, 2010). Apart from the six constructs there were re-written and adapted to the Contextualised-SAGA, there was an additional construct in the original the General-SAGA, the Cultural Mix construct. It was designed to measure students' general attitude towards assignments being done in mixed-national groups (Kimmel and Volet, 2010).

After careful examination of all the articles and book chapters that used this instrument, general or contextualised, it was found that the articles and book chapters used the Contextualised-SAGA are very much focused on the contexts, effects, and impacts of group work as a learning activity. One book chapter and three articles directly address the issues of students working in mixed groups (Kimmel & Volet, 2010, 2012; Summers & Volet, 2008; Volet, 2001) two of which used the General-SAGA (Summers & Volet, 2008; Volet, 2001) and the other two used the Contextualised-SAGA and the additional Cultural Mix construct from the General-SAGA (Kimmel & Volet, 2010, 2012). These four publications play a key role in the development of my own research.

The *General-SAGA* was firstly used in Volet's (2001) research on significance of cultural and motivation variables on students' attitudes towards group work (Volet, 2001). More than five hundred of undergraduate students participated in this study. However, only Australian-born students, Singaporean, and Malaysian students were included. The results in this research shows that students spoke positively of the cognitive aspect of group assignments, however, their attitudes towards the managerial and assessment were rather negative. The Singaporean and Malaysian students reported negative appraisal of friendship aspects of group assignments. The local students and international students in this study held different attitudes towards the value of studying and socialising in working in groups. Apart from reporting on different attitudes towards group work from local and international students, this study also argued that it is important for university educators to be interested in implementing collaborative activities.

In the other study of multicultural group work that used the *General-SAGA* as research instrument, Summers and Volet's (2008) identified students' attitudes contributing to group formation of mixture of assignment groups. More than two hundred undergraduate marketing students across three different years participated in the survey. The results show that students who came from a multilingual background had more positive appraisals of multicultural group work. Local students in mixed groups displayed more positive attitudes towards mixed group work than local students who were in non-mixed groups and students in mixed groups displayed more positive appraisals of mixed group work than did those in non-mixed groups. And after the comparison of answers from students of different

levels of their degree, this study showed that students' attitudes towards culturally mixed group work are not becoming more positive throughout their three years of study. They also suggested that students' self-selection into mixed or non-mixed work groups throughout their studies who largely impact developing a more positive attitude towards mixed groups. The researchers argued that a policy of compulsory culturally mixed group work would foster a positive attitudinal shift.

The Contextualised-SAGA and the Cultural Mix construct were both used in study of university students perception of mixed-culture group work by Kimmel and Volet (Kimmel & Volet, 2010, 2012). In the 2010 study, they surveyed 81 Science students and 88 Business students, who were all second-year undergraduate students and explored the benefits of carefully design and adjusted group work. They stressed the importance of context and diversity on students learning outcomes. And in the 2012 study, building on the same survey result from the 81 Science students and 88 Business students, they had a further methodological development, which was to conduct follow up interviews with students who participated in the previous survey. The second study explores the factors that have had impacts students' attitudes. The results show that students' own attitudes towards intercultural interactions might be affected by the quality of peer interaction in culturally diverse groups, language proficiency, academic competencies, and cohort characteristics can also affect students' attitudes towards mixed cultural groups.

The planning of this research started in 2013 and the research design was finalised in early 2014, in preparation for ethics committee approval before data collection. Apart from Volet's work, multicultural group work was also researched by many other researchers, such as De Vita (2000, 2001), Valiente (2008), Montgomery (2009) and Popov et al. (2012). However, they used either a quantitative approach (De Vita 2000, 2001; Popov et al. 2012) or a qualitative approach (Montgomery, 2009) when researching students' perspectives on MGW. There is also more pedagogical theory work such as Valente's (2008) discussion of different learning styles. None of these researchers had published as extensively as Volet on the topic of multicultural group work by 2013, and Volet and her associates were the only people who were using mixed-method approach at the time. Therefore, I decided to base my research on Volet's work.

#### **2.4.2 The impact of Volet's group work research on the development of my research**

As discussed in the last section, different issues of students working in mixed national groups were reported in Volet's research. However, in her research, only undergraduate students were surveyed. Also, her point of during their study, students' attitudes towards mixed group do not improve in the end comparing to the beginning, was based on the comparison of different students in Year One, Two and Three. Even though there was comparison of students' attitudes before and after a specific group assignment in her study, there was no indication of students' possible change over the time of their degree study. Therefore, a study of students at postgraduate level, and a study of comparing the same students' attitudes in the beginning of their degree and the end of their degree should be able to shed more lights on students' learning experience in multicultural group work.

Attempting to fill this gap, I propose my primary research question: How and to what extent do postgraduate taught students' attitudes towards multicultural group work undergo transformation during the course of their degree studies and what factors are perceived as promoting a more positive multicultural group learning experience?

Apart from the gap of student population and the longitudinal factor, there was also a gap in how students see working in mixed groups in developing their intercultural skills. Research reported on the challenges and attitudes, and students did recognise some benefits of working in groups. However, the assessment of their attitudes does not necessary reflect on the actual experience and the skills they develop. For example, the possibility of students who have negative attitudes towards working in mixed groups might also develop problem-solving skills when dealing with challenges was never reported or researched.

Therefore, one of my secondary research questions has been developed to look into this type of possibility: How do students describe the strategies they have developed for accommodating to their peers and working more effectively and productively in multicultural groups?

As *The Contextualised-SAGA* and the *Cultural Mix construct* will be used to investigate factors affecting students' experience in multicultural group work, it is

a reasonable starting point of developing my own questionnaire. As my research is aiming to look at different sample of students, and aiming to measure change in a longer period of time than just one group task, the adaptation of this instrument accordingly is necessary. Several items from this instrument will be adjusted to suit the context. The adjusted items are shown next to the original items in Appendix 4. Details of development of my questionnaire will be provided in Methodology section.

### 3 Methodology

In this chapter I will discuss why a mixed methods approach is most appropriate for this study. The discussion will include the rationale of methods chosen for this study, the principles of this research design, and the informing pragmatic worldview. I will also introduce the research samples and discuss the limitations of my study and justify why I made certain methodological choices.

This research project uses a sequential explanatory mixed methods strategy for data collection and analysis. It was conducted at University of Warwick, where Postgraduate taught (PGT) students, that is, those undertaking taught master's degrees, are the community that has the most international students, and are therefore the focus of my research. Two questionnaires were designed and distributed at the end of Term 1 and beginning of Term 3. Follow-up interviews were also conducted after the questionnaires to further explore the change of students' attitudes and the coping strategies they developed during their on-going learning in multicultural group work.

#### 3.1 Research paradigm: Pragmatism

Pragmatism as a philosophy originated in the United States in the nineteenth century, largely based on the work of William James, Charles S. Peirce, John Dewey and George Herbert Mead in the fields of psychology, education and philosophy. Pragmatism as a philosophy emphasises that “the meaning of actions and beliefs is found in their consequences”, and shares three other elements: “1) actions cannot be separated from the situations and contexts in which they occur; 2) actions are linked to consequences in ways that are open to change; and 3) actions depend on worldviews that are socially shared set of beliefs” (Morgan, 2014, p. 27-27).

A pragmatic approach to research follows Dewey's (1938) model of inquiry: 1) recognise a problem, 2) think through the problem and search for a likely solution, 3) suggest a solution, a set of actions for solution, 4) reflect on the effects of the solution and 5) follow through with the solution. For pragmatic researchers,

research, as an inquiry, should always begin with a problematic situation that needs to be addressed through actions, and the importance of this process of decision making, also known as a “paradigm of choices” (Patton, 1988), or “contingency theory” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) has been emphasised in social science research (Morgan, 2014).

Pragmatism argues that a reality can only be encountered through human experience although it exists apart from human experience, and all knowledge of the world is based on experience. And for pragmatic researchers, methodology is not about questioning the research methods, but is mainly about why you want to research one way rather than other and why you produce one form of knowledge rather than another (Morgan, 2014).

I have taken a pragmatic approach in this research: I recognised the issues that lie in multicultural group work in Higher Education and that the perceptions of this experience would vary on an individual level and, accordingly, that studying the perceptions of this experience from students would potentially contribute to improve this experience. I therefore developed the research questions presented at the end of the literature review and decided on a mixed methods research design in which I would data from different sources in order to understand students’ experience.

### 3.2 Research Design and procedure: a sequential explanatory mixed methods design

To answer Research Question 1 (What differences are discernible between the attitudes of students at the commencement and conclusion of their one-year postgraduate taught course?), data was needed about students’ attitudes at the beginning of academic year and at the end of their taught courses. Attitude is defined by Oppenheim (1992, p.174) as “a state of readiness, a tendency to respond in a certain manner when confronted with certain stimuli”; he explains that most of the time, an individual’s attitudes are dormant and they will not be expressed in speech or behaviour unless the object of the attitude is perceived. In other words,



only by asking the right questions or producing relevant attitude statements would I be able to measure students' attitudes towards multicultural group work.

A qualitative approach such as asking participants for self-reported attitude changes can provide evidence of a change in attitudes. However, it creates a higher demand on participants' abilities of reflection and re-evaluation. Also, it would not be able to reveal the change, if there is any, in a measurable way. On the other hand, well-designed attitude statements are useful to elicit students' thoughts and for measuring minor changes. In general, therefore, a quantitative approach is most appropriate for measuring attitudes and understanding predictors or identifying influential factors of outcomes (Creswell, 2014).

Research Question 2 (To what factors are perceived attitudinal changes attributable?) is a follow-up question to the previous one, therefore it could be answered using the same data collected for the previous question. A comparison of students' answers to the attitude statements for identifying changes is necessary to answer this question. The answer would additionally be supported by qualitative data, as qualitative approaches enable researchers to report on multiple perspectives and identify factors (Creswell, 2014).

Research Question 3 (How do students describe the strategies they have developed for accommodating to their peers and working more effectively and productively in multicultural groups?) seeks to elicit in-depth reflection and re-evaluation of the multicultural group work students complete during their course of study. A qualitative approach would be effective in getting data about students' reflections on their own group work experience – reflections which would involve themes such as describing their own strategies in coping and learning through multicultural group work. This kind of approach enables researchers to report on multiple perspectives and sketch an emerging holistic picture of situations (Creswell, 2014).

As both quantitative data and qualitative data are needed to answer all the research questions, this study requires a mixed methods design.

Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner (2007) reviewed 19 definitions of mixed methods research and concluded five themes across them: 1) what is mixed? (Hunter & Brewer, 2003) 2) the mixing stage (Yin, 2006), 3) the breadth of mixed research

(Creswell & Clark, 2007), 4) why mixing is carried out in research (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), and 5) the orientation of mixed methods research (Mertens, 2003; Tashakkori, 2006). They proposed the following definition based on their analysis:

Mixed methods research is the type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration. (Johnson et al., 2007, p.123)

Before continuing the discussion of mixing approaches, it is worth looking into what qualitative and quantitative approaches are and their differences. Table 3-01 lists a very brief summary and comparison of quantitative research and qualitative research. As shown in the table, quantitative research uses pre-determined approaches and closed-ended questions to collect numeric data, emphasising achieving generalisability and universal laws, while qualitative research uses emerging approaches and open-ended questions to collect text and image data, with the goal of discovery and theory formation. Limited by methods, single-approach designs can only be either confirmatory (quantitative research questions) or exploratory (qualitative research questions).

Mixed methods research designs allow confirmatory and exploratory questions to be addressed simultaneously with both qualitative and quantitative approaches, creating an opportunity for examining the research questions differently, which enables theories to be generated and verified in the same study (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009). The central premise of mixed methods research is that “the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches, in combination, provides a better understanding research problems than either approach alone” (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 5).

However, the choice of a mixed methods design for this study is not just because qualitative and quantitative approaches each have their own limitations but more importantly for the purposes of collecting the most suitable type of data to answer each research question. This decision is informed by a pragmatic worldview.

Table 3-01: Summary and comparison of quantitative and qualitative approaches

	Quantitative research	Qualitative research
Definition	Research interested in frequencies and distributions of issues, events or practices by collecting standardized data and using numbers and statistics for analysing them (Flick, 2014, p. 542).	Research interested in analysing the subjective meaning or the social production of issues, events, or practices by collecting non-standardized data and analysing texts and images rather numbers and statistics  (Flick, 2014, p. 542).
Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Closed-ended questions</li> <li>▪ Pre-determined approaches</li> <li>▪ Numeric data</li> </ul> (Creswell, 2014, p. 18)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Open-ended questions</li> <li>▪ Emerging approaches</li> <li>▪ Text or image data</li> </ul> (Creswell, 2014, p. 18)
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Using numbers</li> <li>▪ A priori categorization</li> <li>▪ Variables rather than cases</li> <li>▪ Statistics and the language of statistics</li> <li>▪ Standardized procedures to assess objective reality</li> <li>▪ Quest for generalizability and universal laws</li> </ul> (Dornyei, 2007, pp. 32–34)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Contextually as a guiding principle</li> <li>▪ Perspectives of participants</li> <li>▪ Reflective capability of the investigator</li> <li>▪ Understanding as a discovery principle</li> <li>▪ Principle of openness</li> <li>▪ Case analysis as a starting point</li> <li>▪ Construction of reality as a basis</li> <li>▪ Qualitative research as a textual discipline</li> <li>▪ Discovery and theory formation as a goal (Flick, 2004, p. 9)</li> </ul>
Designs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Experimental designs</li> <li>▪ Non-experimental designs such as surveys</li> </ul> (Creswell, 2014, p. 12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Narrative research</li> <li>▪ Phenomenology</li> <li>▪ Grounded theory</li> <li>▪ Ethnographies</li> <li>▪ Case study</li> </ul> (Creswell, 2014, p. 12)

In order to accommodate the data collection for all research questions, an explanatory sequential mixed methods design was adopted for this study. This type of design involves firstly collecting and analysing quantitative data, and secondly using the results of the analysis to plan the qualitative data collection. Specifically, the questions that will be asked and the participants that will be purposefully selected for the qualitative data collection are based on the results of the quantitative data analysis (Creswell, 2014).

Table 3-02 provides an overview of the entire design and process of my research. It introduces the purpose of each phase of data collection, the steps, the procedure involved in each step, the products of each step and the timeline of the project. As shown in the table, there are two phases and five data collection points in this study. Phase 1 includes two data collection points: one questionnaire (Step 1) and one round of interviews (Step 2); Phase 2 also has two data collection points: one questionnaire (Step 5) and one round of interviews (Step 8). The two phases and five data collection points are necessary to this study and the order cannot be altered as each step has some implications for the following procedures.

Table 3-02: Phases, steps, procedures, outputs and timeline of the study

	Research questions	Purpose	Steps	Procedure	Output	Timeline
<b>Phase 1</b>	<b>1, 2</b>	Measuring students' attitudes towards their first experience of group work at this HEI	<b>Questionnaire Term 1</b> (Quantitative data and qualitative data collection) [S1]	Online survey sent to all Master's students	Numeric data [O1] Text data (answers to one open-ended question) [O2] A mailing list of all participants [O3]	End of Term 1 (2014 December)
			Quantitative data analysis [S2]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Data screening</li> <li>▪ Frequencies</li> <li>▪ (SPSS 22 was used)</li> </ul>	N=286 Descriptive statistics	
			Qualitative data analysis [S3]	Screening for emerging themes	Themes could be used for interview questions [O4]	
				Developing interview questions based on questionnaire data and research questions	Interview protocol [O5]	
	<b>1, 2</b>	Further insights of students' first experience of mixed-culture group work at this HEI	<b>Interviews with students I</b> (Qualitative data collection) [S4]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Email invitations to follow-up interviews sent to all respondents to Questionnaire Term 1</li> <li>▪ Semi-structured interviews conducted</li> </ul>	35 interviews (interview audio recordings and transcripts) [O6]	Beginning of Term 2 (2015 January)

<b>Phase 2</b>	1, 2	Measuring students' attitudes towards their overall experience of group work for this one year degree	<b>Questionnaire Term 3</b> (Quantitative data and qualitative data collection) [S5]	Online survey sent via the mailing list established from Questionnaire Term 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Numeric data [O7]</li> <li>Text data (answers to one open-ended question) [O8]</li> </ul>	Beginning of Term 3 (2015 May)
			Quantitative data analysis [S6]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Data screening</li> <li>Frequencies</li> <li>Combining data set from 2 questionnaires</li> <li>Paired t-test</li> <li>Factor analysis</li> <li>(SPSS 22 was used)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N=126</li> <li>Descriptive statistics</li> <li>Individual comparison of answers from interviewees was prepared for the second interviews [O9]</li> </ul>	
			Qualitative data analysis [S7]	Screening for emerging themes	Themes could be used for interview questions [O10]	
				Developing interview questions based on questionnaire data and research questions	Interview protocol [O11]	
	1, 2, 3	Students' self-explanation of their attitude changes and their coping strategies developed from experience of group work	<b>Interviews with students II</b> (Qualitative data collection) [S8]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selected interviewees from previous interviews invited for a second interview</li> <li>Semi-structured interviews conducted</li> </ul>	22 interviews (interview audio recordings and transcripts) [O12]	Mid-Term 3 (2015 June)

### **3.2.1 Phase I: postgraduate students' initial experience of multicultural group work at this HEI**

As students have very different levels of experience regarding working in groups at a Higher Education level, I decided it was more appropriate to wait until the end of Term 1 in the academic year to ask students about their experience. This was so the participants would have had some contact with group work if they had not before. Questionnaire Term 1 was an online questionnaire designed to measure students' attitudes towards their first experience of group work at this university.

Master's students enrolled in the academic year 2014-2015 were chosen as the target group. Questionnaire Term 1 was distributed via email to those master's students selected for the study. I collected all the email addresses via the people search function on the university's internal webpage, which was a service available to internal users of the university mailing system. All the addresses collected were marked as "PGT students" by the mailing system. I also prepared flyers with a link to the online questionnaire and distributed these where students would see them, that is, in study spaces on campus that were accessible only to postgraduate students. The online questionnaire was accessible for one month and three reminders were sent in order to maximise the response rate. At the end of Term 1 (early December 2014), students were most likely to have finished their first group work, therefore this was identified as the time for Questionnaire Term 1 to measure students' first impression of group work in their courses. The online questionnaire was closed at the beginning of Term 2 (early January 2015).

After the questionnaire was closed, the numeric data (Output 1, Table 3-02) was processed using SPSS 22 in order to generate descriptive statistics. Frequencies and correlations between items were tested. The text data of one open-ended question (Output 2) were also screened for emerging themes that could be used as possible interview questions. A mailing list (Output 3) was drawn up of the respondents and an invitation to interviews sent via this list.

It was very important to conduct interviews with students as soon as possible in Term 2 before they began engaging in any group work; consequently, there was limited time for analysis of the quantitative data to be undertaken (Step 2). Themes emerged from one open-ended question response were not enough for establishing

an effective interview protocol (Step 3). Therefore, the constructs in the questionnaire were also used as an add-on part of the final interview protocol (Product 5).

Interviews with students I (Step 4) were arranged in the first three weeks of Term 2 (January 2015) and participants were respondents from Questionnaire Term 1 who replied to the email invitation to be interviewed. The purpose of this round of interviews was to further explore students' first experience of multicultural group work at this university.

Phase 1 data would be mainly contributing to answer secondary research questions 1 and 2 alongside Phase 2, and it would be the foundation that Phase 2 built on.

### **3.2.2 Phase II: postgraduate students' attitudes towards their overall experience of multicultural group work over one academic year**

In their one-year master's course at this university, most students would no longer have group work after the taught modules were completed. By the beginning of Term 3 (May 2015), master's degree courses would be winding up the teaching content and students would be left to complete their own projects or dissertation. Therefore, I decided to distribute Questionnaire Term 3 at this time of year so that students would be just finishing their last group projects if there were any.

Questionnaire Term 3 was sent via the email list established for the previous respondents (Step 5). This questionnaire was aiming at measuring students' attitudes towards their overall experience of group work in this entire year. Data collected includes numeric data of attitude measurement (Output 7) and text data of one open-ended question (Output 8).

This data (Output 7) was paired with answers from Questionnaire Term 1 (Product 1) so that a comparison of data could be established (Output 9). By this means, any changes in students' attitudes could be identified.

Similar to a quasi-experimental design, which "primarily depends on self-selection of administrative decisions to determine who is to be exposed to a treatment" (Cook, Campbell & Peracchio, 1990, p. 492), this comparison of two sets of questionnaire data aims at measuring the possible difference of students' attitudes towards



multicultural group work at different times in their academic year. However, as the frequencies and the nature of group work activities that student participants were involved in were entirely decided by the teaching staff of their degree course, I as the researcher had no control over the “treatment”. Therefore, this research step is not entirely a quasi-experiment.

Text data from the one open-ended question (Output 8) was screened for emerging themes that could be used for questions to ask in the following interviews. Interview protocol (Output 11) was established based on the analysis of the questionnaire data, which includes the paired individual answers for interviewees, themes emerging from text data (Output 10) from the questionnaire and more questions for answering Research Question 3 and and Research Question 5, such as participants’ suggestions for future improvements for a better intercultural learning environment.

Interviews II with students (Step 8) were conducted mid-Term 3 (June 2015) when most of the masters degree courses ended their taught modules.

### 3.3 Research population and sample

When it comes to sampling in mixed-methods studies, there are different elements needing to be considered before deciding on the strategy. Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009) argue that the following concerns need to be addressed when making this decision:

- 1) Derive logically the research questions or hypotheses being investigated/tested
- 2) Be faithful to the assumptions on which the sampling strategies are based
- 3) Generate qualitative and quantitative data in order to answer the research questions
- 4) Enable clear inference to be drawn from both the numerical and qualitative data
- 5) Abide by ethical principles
- 6) Be practicable and efficient
- 7) Enable generalizability of the results
- 8) Be reported in a level of detail that will enable other researchers to understand it and perhaps use it in the future

Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009, p.192-3)

In this research, I have chosen to use theoretical sampling, which Glaser and Strauss (1967) define as:

the process of data collection for generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyzes his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges. This process of data collection is controlled by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal. The initial decisions for theoretical collection of data are based only on a general sociological perspective and on a general subject or problem area...The initial decisions are not based on a preconceived theoretical framework. (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, p. 45)

To use this sampling technique, the researcher needs to answer two questions: 1) which groups are selected, and 2) how and why they are selected (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). As briefly mentioned in the research design, the PGT students who were enrolled on a one-year master's course at the University of Warwick in the UK in the academic year 2014-2015 were selected to be the target sample.

Firstly, as an international student who studied on a one-year master's course in the UK and had the experience of working in multicultural groups, I myself as the researcher had a personal insight on how students generally navigate through this one-year course. Also, this group of students were the only group whose entire progress I would be able to monitor and observe within the scope and timeline of my doctoral study. Secondly, based on the previous Warwick Academic Statistics Yearbooks (2010-2014), this group of students are the most diverse cohort on campus. This source is an official document published online, available to all employees of the university. In addition, group work is frequently used in teaching, so multicultural group work played a significant role in the academic life of this group of students.

Table 3-03 presents the student numbers for the year previous to data collection as included in Warwick Academic Statistics Yearbook (2014-2015).

Table 3-03: Ratio of overseas master's students in three faculties

	All Master's degree students	Overseas (Non-EU) students	Ratio
Faculty of Arts	206	66	3.12:1
Faculty of Science and Medicine	2274	1199	1.89:1
Faculty of Social Science	4530	2249	2.01:1
Total	7010	3514	1.99:1

The three faculties presented in the table were how the data was originally organised in the statistics yearbook. This categorisation continues to be used in this research in order to keep the statistics reported in the present study as close to the original data as possible. These are not selected according to the three faculties, but all three faculties include the entire population of masters students.

The category of overseas students in the *Warwick Statistics Yearbook 2014-2015* refers to non-EU international students (students that come from outside the European Union). EU students are currently categorised as home students along with UK students, as their tuition fees are the same.

However, in my research, I treat non-UK students from the EU as international students along with students from outside the EU. I use “international students” to refer to all non-UK students, and “home students” to refer only to UK nationals. So the number of international students in the PGT population is actually larger than the number of “overseas” students shown in Table 3.03 and thus the ratio of international students to all master’s students is higher than the numbers indicated in the table above for overseas students.

In order to provide more precise information about the student population at this university, I contacted the Strategic Planning & Analytics Office at the University of Warwick for further information about the statistics. However, the office uses different criteria for categorising students, and the numbers of students in one specific academic year are represented slightly differently in other sources. Table 4 is generated from another record, *Academic Statistics Online*, 2014 edition. The total number of PGT students was recorded as 7229, of which 3228 were home students and 4001 were international students. The largest international student cohorts of PGT students are from China (1153), EU & Switzerland & Norway (836), India (258) and Nigeria (220).

Table 3-04: PGT student numbers by world region (Academic Statistics Online, 2014)

Region	PGT student numbers
Africa	334
Associated States of Russia	99
Caribbean	16
East Asia	1469
EU & Switzerland & Norway	836
Europe - UK	3228
Latin America	93
Mid East / North Africa	196
North America	181
ROW Australia and New Zealand	20
Russia	81
South Asia	368
South East Asia	232
Turkey	52
Others	22

Based on the student population information, Questionnaire Term 1 was distributed to all PGT students of academic year 2014-2015. Subsequently, 286 valid responses were received. As explained in the last section, Interviews I with students were aiming at further exploring students' first experience of group work at this HEI, and the protocol for interviews was developed from the answers to the constructs in Questionnaire Term 1. The participants in this questionnaire were therefore natural to be chosen as the target group for interviewing, and 35 students were interviewed for this step.

The purpose of running Questionnaire Term 3 was to establish a comparison with the answer from the first questionnaire in regards to possible changes in attitudes students might have had during the course of their study. Therefore, it only made sense to continuing surveying the participants who already took part in the first questionnaire. In all, 116 valid answers were collected from this questionnaire.

Interviews II with students would serve a major role in this project, as the students would be re-introduced to their own answers to the questionnaires and be invited to comment on their answers. Only students who took part in the previous three steps would be most appropriate to be interviewed. Also, only students who had more multicultural group work after the first interviews were invited for further interviews to discuss their continuing experience. Table 3-05 is a summary of all the participants in the entire data collection. The table shows there were significantly more female participants than male participants in this study. However, it is not clear whether this gender imbalance was inadvertently caused in the data collection process or it is actually reflecting the student population, as there was no statistical data on gender from any valid source for this cohort of students.

Table 3-05: Participant demographics by data collection method

Method	Number of Participants	Number of Nationality	Gender
Questionnaire Term 1	286	66	114 Male; 170 Female; 2 Unknown
Interviews I with students	35	14	4 Male; 31 Female
Questionnaire Term 3	126	43	43 Male; 71 Female; 2 Unknown
Interviews II with students	22	9	2 Male; 20 Female

### 3.4 Ethical considerations

My application for ethical approval was submitted to my department and approved by the ethics committee before participants were recruited for the data collection, which was an important part of deciding research strategies (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2003).

When the questionnaire participants were contacted, there was a cover letter (Appendix 1a), sent with the questionnaire (Appendix 3), explaining the purpose of the study, how their responses would be used in this research, and a brief introduction about the researcher as a research student at University of Warwick (Bryman and Bell, 2007).

In order to preserve anonymity and protect their identities, the questionnaires did not ask participants to divulge their names. The respondents were only asked to fill in a valid email address for further contact in the Term 1. They were also asked to provide their email address again, only to be used as tool to link Term 3 data to Term 1 data. For questionnaire respondents, they were also provided with the option to request their own reports of the differences of their attitudes measured in the two questionnaires.

As for interview participants, they were all introduced to the full scale and purpose of this study, before the official interviews started. A cover letter (Appendix 1b) was provided. Any questions and concerns research raised by students their involvement in the study were carefully answered, especially regarding their anonymity in this study. Participants are all given pseudo names and unique participant ID numbers. Participants were checked to feeling comfortable before start talking about their experiences during interviews. Small private rooms in study space on university campus were booked for individual interviews with student participants in order to help ensure privacy. Interviewees were asked to sign a consent form (Appendix 2) prior to their participation, and they were asked to confirm verbally their willingness to participate and this was recorded at the start of the interviews. In particular, with the Chinese interviewees, I chose to interview them in Mandarin to minimise any discomfort and concerns and maximise their ability to express their thoughts. There precautions were used following the ethical principles of research in education (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011).

All data was stored according to departmental ethical guidelines, without personal identifying details, and this information was conveyed to participants in the consent form.

As an intercultural studies student, I have been trained to be sensitive to different communication styles and cultural values. I also have gained experience in dealing with international students enquires from my professional background, prior to my PhD study. This experience also helped me to be more considerate when interviewing students. This study does not involve any psychological or physical risks to participants. The time and location for interviews was tailored to interviewees' needs.

## 3.5 Research instruments

### 3.5.1 Questionnaires

As discussed in detail in the last section, two questionnaires were used in this mixed methods study. Questionnaire is a very efficient research tool with many advantages, such as allowing researchers to reach wider numbers of participants in a short period of time. It also has several disadvantages that have to be acknowledged and taken into account (See Table 3-06).

Table 3-06: Advantages and disadvantages of the questionnaire method (Gilliam, 2006, pp. 6-7)

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Low cost in time and money</li><li>▪ Easy to get information from a lot of people quickly</li><li>▪ Respondents can complete the questionnaire when it suits them</li><li>▪ Analysis of answers to closed questions is straightforward</li><li>▪ Less pressure for an immediate response</li><li>▪ Respondents' anonymity</li><li>▪ Lack of interviewer bias</li><li>▪ Standardization of questions (but true of structured interviews)</li><li>▪ Can provide suggestive data for testing a hypothesis</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Problems of data quality (completeness and accuracy)</li><li>▪ Typically low response rate unless sample 'captive'</li><li>▪ Problems of motivating respondents</li><li>▪ The need for brevity and relatively simple questions</li><li>▪ Misunderstandings cannot be corrected</li><li>▪ Questionnaire development is often poor</li><li>▪ Seeks information just by asking questions</li><li>▪ Assumes respondents have answers available in an organized fashion</li><li>▪ Lack of control over order and context of answering questions</li><li>▪ Question wording can have a major effect on answers</li><li>▪ Respondent literacy problems</li><li>▪ People talk more easily than they write</li><li>▪ Impossible to check seriousness or honesty of answers</li><li>▪ Respondent uncertainty as to what happens to data.</li></ul>

When developing questionnaires, a small quantity of data should be collected for the purpose of piloting the questions and thereby refining and improving it. Three popular ways to conduct this testing part are: 1) focus or discussion group; 2) semi-structured interview; and 3) semi-structured questionnaire (Gilliam, 2007). I drafted the first version of Questionnaire Term 1 based on what has been reported in the literature. To bring more practical insights to the content, I conducted a discussion

group interview and a semi-structured interview with three PGT students during their course of study. Due to the nature of our relationships and the relaxed social context where the interviews were conducted, the interviewees were very open to talking in detail about their experience of group work at this university. Their insights contributed a great deal to the writing of the attitude statements for the questionnaires.

It was important to be careful with writing the statements. There are three general considerations in constructing and wording questions: common sense, knowledge and experience (Peterson, 2000). In drafting my attitude statements, I followed Peterson's (2000) advice to be brief, relevant, unambiguous, specific and objective. I also tried to follow Cohen et al.'s direction to make the statements look "easy, attractive and interesting rather than complicated, unclear, forbidding and boring" (2000, p. 258). For example:

I prefer to work with students from the same first language background,
Group assignments should be assessed on an individual basis, and
Group assignments provide opportunities to get useful feedback on one's understanding of the topic.

The length of the questionnaire, which was how long it takes to complete the entire process, was also taken into consideration. Dörnyei (2003) argues that a 30-minute completion time should be appropriate. A rough estimation of the completion time was twenty-five and thirty minutes.

Questionnaire Term 1 (See Appendix 3) consists of three sections: 1) questions asking for students' personal information; 2) questions asking for students' previous study experience of multicultural group work; and 3) 39 items (8 categories) aiming to measure students' attitudes towards multicultural group work and one open-ended question.

Section 1 of Questionnaire Term 1 was designed to gather students' background information, such as age, nationality and gender. It included open-ended questions such as email address and study abroad experience and also dichotomous questions such as gender. The questionnaires were administered online on SurveyMonkey. The list of nominal and numeral data collected for this questionnaire is as follows:



email, age, gender, nationality, first languages, level of study, course of study, year of study and study abroad experience was asked in this section. However, among all the questions only the email address question was mandatory, as it would serve the crucial role of linking the answers to both questionnaires from the same respondent.

Section 2 of Questionnaire Term 1 has two types of questions (See Appendix 3). The size of the group can have an influence on the experience of participants during the group work, therefore a multiple choice question was included concerning the average size of the groups in which they worked. The rest of this section consisted of 14 closed-ended questions in four categories, which were designed to gather information on students' previous study experience of multicultural group work. The responses are recorded in a 6-point Likert scale, with 1 representing strongly disagree or never, and 6 representing strongly agree or always. Not applicable as an option is given at the end of the scale, to accommodate the possibility that some students might have no experience of group work before coming to study in this HEI.

Section 3 of Questionnaire Term 1 consisted of 39 closed-ended questions and 1 open-ended question. All closed-ended questions were attitude measurement items using a 6-point Likert scale. The items were designed based on eight categories of themes reported in the literature (See Table 3.07) where 1 represents strongly disagree and 6 represents strongly agree. Not applicable was not offered as an option in this section. Among all the 39 items, 11 items were adapted from the contextualised version of Volet's (2001) general Students' Appraisals of Group Assignments instrument (See Appendix 4).

Compared to the first questionnaire, Questionnaire Term 3 has a much simpler Section 1, only asking for email, age, gender and nationality. This part of information was used as the tool to link the answers to this questionnaire with the Questionnaire Term 1 for the same respondent.

Table 3-07: Categories of themes derived from the literature

Categories	Items
Students' recognition of the benefits of working on assignments together as a group	5
Students' recognition of the challenges in managing the process of working together for assignments	5
Assessment preference	3
Group work as a source of social disruption and conflict	4
Language diversity as a barrier to group work	5
Personal/emotional factors affecting attitudes towards group work	4
Students' recognition of the value of 'multicultural groups'	9
Students' expectation of tutors' involvement during group work (Term 1 only)	4
Students' expectation of tutors' involvement during group work (Term 3 only)	4

Section 2 and Section 3 of Questionnaire Term 3 were the exactly the same as Questionnaire Term 1.

In order to determine the extent of the validity of this questionnaire, Questionnaire Term 1 was piloted with 50 undergraduate students and PhD students. Apart from answering the questionnaire, some students also provided feedback about the wording of these attitude measurement items. They also commented on the first two sections of the questionnaire as some questions were not applicable. All the suggestions were taken into consideration, and the questionnaire was adjusted accordingly.

### 3.5.2 Interviews

In academic research, an interview is defined as “a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation” (Cannell & Kahn, 1968, p. 271).

Interviews are used for three purposes: 1) the principal means of gathering information on research objectives; 2) an explanatory device for identifying variables and relationships or for testing hypotheses or suggesting new ones; 3) for

use in conjunction with other methods in an ongoing research (Cohen et al., 2007). In contrast to questionnaires, interviews have the advantages of significantly higher response rates, extensive opportunities for personalisation and asking, as well as a great chance for probing (Cohen et al., 2007).

Research interviews can be structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Parker (2005) argues that interviews cannot be completely structured and unstructured because the researchers are always prepared and have a good knowledge of what to ask and interviewees always answer more than they are asked for. Semi-structured interviews are most commonly used in research. They are more useful than structured interviews and unstructured interviews because they offer more freedom to interviewees and more say in determining the priority issues in the discussion (Brinkmann, 2013).

A semi-structured interview is “an interview with the purpose of obtaining the description of the life world of the interviewees in order to interpret the meaning of the described phenomena” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). It is used to serve the researcher’s goal of producing knowledge, aiming at obtaining the interviewee’s descriptions rather than reflections or theorisation of the life world, and it requires interviewer to interpret the interviewee’s description (Brinkmann, 2013).

Individual semi-structured face-to-face interviews were selected as the qualitative part of my mixed methods approach. Individual interviews enable interviewers to take the lead in the conversation and create an atmosphere of trust and discretion and face-to-face interviews provide a chance for interviewers to study interviewees’ gesture, body language and facial expressions in addition to the content of discussion (Brinkmann, 2013).

Interview I with students focused on students’ assumptions and expectations of multicultural group work. An email was sent to all the respondents to Questionnaire Term 1 asking for follow-up interviews regarding their experience of group work in Term 1. By now, all students would have gained first-hand experience of postgraduate study. Multicultural group work during this time might require more of their interpersonal skills and management ability in addition to the academic content learning ability. The interviews were aimed at finding out: 1) the challenges or difficulties encountered during the group work; 2) what the most unexpected

thing that happened was and 3) what kind of help or support would help to make their study experience slightly easier.

Interviews II with students are also semi-structured interviews. I used theoretical sampling to choose participants for this round of interviews because “non-probability samples also reflect the issue that sampling can be of people but it can also be of issues” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 161). I only interviewed the students who did more group work after the previous interviews. This time, apart from questions about their study in Term 2 and Term 3, interviewees were shown their own responses to questionnaires. Their own explanations of their attitudes shifting are the central part of this round of interviews. They were also invited to comment on items on which they scored particularly differently than the average answers of other respondents.

As this is a cross-cultural research study, different strategies were employed to minimize the effects of cultural bias. First of all, the participants were master’s students studying at the same university, who were samples of different cultural groups studying matched subjects, which is a strategy for controlling the demographic differences across cultural groups (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). Secondly, when interviewing participants who were from different cultures from mine, I tried to be inviting in the conversations and used non-evaluating intonation to ensure the openness and clarity of the communication, as the interviewer’s personal intercultural communication skills will influence the accuracy of the communication (Asante & Gudykunst, 1989; Hammer 1989)

### 3.6 Data analysis procedures

#### 3.6.1 Quantitative data

After being retrieved from SurveyMonkey online platform, the data from Questionnaire Term 1 was transferred into SPSS 22 for analysis. Before any analysis was done, the data was screened so that the empty entries could be eliminated. Each entry was given an individual respondent ID, for example, Q1001. As for the entries that were selected for analysis, the partially missing data was all marked as missing values so that it would not affect the accuracy of the analysis.

When the questionnaires were designed, some of the statements were written in a way that was contradicting the constructs they belong to so that respondents would not answer all the statements in a pattern without reading carefully. These opposite items were reversed when they were being analysed.

After the data was prepared and ready for analysis, reliability tests were carried out for each original construct in the design to see if they could pass the statistical requirements. In the results, three original constructs reached Cronbach's alpha value so they were kept for the analysis. As for the constructs that could not be used, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted with the statements belonging to these constructs to determine if new constructs could be established. After testing the reliabilities of the all the possible new factors, two new constructs were finalised in the end for further analysis. As for the statements that were not selected into any constructs, they were analysed independently.

Reliability tests were carried out to test the validity of the original constructs (Table 3-07) in the questionnaire design. This step was important because all the constructs were newly established in this study. Three of the constructs were valid, and the details of the constructs are shown in Table 3-08.

In Table 3-08, the construct *Preference of being assessed individually* has a Cronbach's alpha score of .0665, which did not match the common requirement of above 0.7. However, one could argue that it still be used as a valid construct as this questionnaire is not specifically designed for a strictly psychological test. Scoring 0.665 is acceptable in this case (Cortina, 1993; Field, 2009). And under the category UK, it did achieve more than 0.7.

Table 3-08: Validity of three original constructs

<b>Original construct</b>	<b>No. of items</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>China</b>	<b>EEA (excl.UK)</b>	<b>Others</b>
Students' recognition of the benefits of working on assignments together as a group (Benefits of group work)	5	.876	.841	.843	.929	.882
Preference of being assessed individually	3	.665	.739	.616	.672	.637
Students' recognition of the value of 'multicultural groups' (Benefits of multicultural group work)	9	.858	.845	.822	.887	.873

As for those original constructs that did not match the requirement of the reliability test, a factor analysis was carried out with those items for the purposes of discovering new constructs. Based on the results, two new constructs were established after this analysis. Table 3-09 below shows the names, numbers of items and Cronbach's alpha scores of the two new constructs.

Table 3-09: Validity of two new constructs

<b>New construct</b>	<b>No. of items</b>	<b>Cronbach's alpha</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>China</b>	<b>EEA (exc.UK)</b>	<b>Others</b>
Challenges for multicultural group work	4	.779	.780	.611	.778	.798
Challenges in managing group work	5	.764	.749	.741	.794	.761

After all the original and new constructs were finalised and analysed, group variables were explored and established for group comparison in order to find out if any subgroup of participants had different patterns of attitudes and perceptions compared to the rest of the participant population. In this process, new variables were explored based on their nationalities, first languages, disciplines and courses of study. The subgroups' scores for different constructs were compared to find out if they had any impact on participants' thoughts.

The exploration of different courses and disciplines was not successful because there were significantly more social science students than students from other

disciplines. And for many interdisciplinary courses, students were from different undergraduate degree backgrounds and they were also studying modules across arts, social science, science and medicine. The nature of the course made it way too ambiguous to decide on subgroups. There will therefore be no results reported on this topic.

In the end, a new variable called Region was established, and it divided participants into four groups: UK, China, EEA (excluding UK) and Other. This Regional group was set out to explore if where students came from really had a large impact on how they think similarly or differently to students from more distant cultures, and also to explore if home students had different opinions than international students. Group UK refers to students who indicated their nationality as UK, Group China refers to the Chinese students. These two are single nationality regional groups because the percentage of the participants from each of these two groups is big enough. Group EEA (excluding UK) refers to students from other EU countries including Switzerland, Norway and Iceland. All the other participants of nationalities that did not fall into the above groups were grouped as one regional group: Other. The percentile of different groups, and details of the regional group differences in how they scored in all the constructs are reported in Chapter 4.

Another variable was Native English speakers (L1) or Non-Native English (L2) speakers. In the questionnaires, “What are your first languages?” is an open-ended question, so that students would identify their own native languages without being limited to one mother tongue. This variable was set out to explore if native English speakers had a different set of attitudes compared to non-native English speakers. The comparison of the two groups of participants is also reported in Chapter 4. This concluded the analysis of Questionnaire Term 1 on its own.

After data from Questionnaire Term 1 was analysed, data from Questionnaire Term 3 was added to the data set using participants’ email addresses as a linking point. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, only respondents from Questionnaire Term 1 were invited to participate in Questionnaire Term 3, so that a set of longitudinal data from the same participants could be obtained.

Before the longitudinal analysis was conducted, a full analysis of Questionnaire Term 3 was done following the same procedures as Questionnaire Term 1. All the

steps described above were repeated when analysing Questionnaire Term 3 data, and the results of this are reported in Chapter 4 as well.

When starting the analysis of Questionnaire Term 3, the same step of reliability tests was carried out to test the validity of the original constructs and new constructs that were established based on Questionnaire Term 1 data. Table 3-10 shows that all Cronbach's Alpha scores are above 0.7, so it can be concluded that all the constructs are still applicable to the Questionnaire Term 3 data.

Table\_3-10 Validity of Term 3 constructs

<b>Construct</b>	<b>No. of items</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>UK</b>	<b>China</b>	<b>EEA (excl.UK)</b>	<b>Other</b>
Benefits of group work (Term 3)	5	.901	.863	.839	.945	.888
Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)	3	.722	.648	.799	.857	.641
Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)	9	.863	.869	.754	.834	.898
Challenges for multicultural group work (Term 3)	4	.751	.746	.608	.618	.777
Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)	5	.819	.680	.838	.801	.854

In Table 3-10 above, even though all the constructs achieved Cronbach's Alpha scores above 0.7, some of the regional data scored less than that. However, all of them are still above 0.6. As explained before for the Questionnaire Term 1 data, because these questionnaires are not specifically designed for strictly psychological tests, scoring above 0.6 is still acceptable in this case. Accordingly, all of the constructs and regional categories will be used for group comparison.

In the final stage of quantitative data analysis, a longitudinal data comparison was carried out to compare the same participants' responses at different times of their postgraduate study. After a comparison of all the participants was carried out, the subgroups that were used for previous analysis were also used here to find out if any subgroup of participants had changed their perceptions over time. All these comparisons are also discussed in detail in Chapter 4.



### 3.6.2 Qualitative data

There are two types of qualitative data in this study. The first type of qualitative data is written data from questionnaires. The final question in the questionnaires, “how has your attitude toward multicultural group work changed since in the beginning of the course”, is an open-ended question concluding the entire questionnaire. It was asked both times, in Questionnaire Term 1 and Questionnaire Term 3, and it was strategically placed at the end of the questionnaires to provide a space for students to reflect on and reevaluate their own experience. Also, more importantly, this data relates to how the participants perceived their experience, reported in their own writing in their own comfortable way of phrasing.

As some of the participants provided answers once, either in the first time or the second time, and some others provided answers twice, their quotes are differentiated using a suffix, such as Q1001.1 meaning the respondent Q1001’s answer in the first questionnaire, Questionnaire Term 1, and Q1001.2 meaning the respondent Q1001’s answer in the second questionnaire, Questionnaire Term 3.

Another type of qualitative data is spoken interview data. In order to show connections between the data from the same respondent, the questionnaire respondent IDs are attached to the examples presented from the interviews. A suffix “.INT” was added to differentiate the interview spoken data from the written ones. For example, Q1001.INT means the questionnaire respondent Q1001’s interview data.

The interviews were transcribed because the transcription of spoken data is essential to conduct thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this way, all the data is text-based, so that a thematic analysis could be performed to analyse the qualitative data all together.

According to Kuckartz (2014), there are eight stages of performing a thematic qualitative text analysis:

1. Research questions
2. Initial work with text: highlight important passages, compose memos
3. Develop main topic categories
4. First coding process: code the available data using the main categories
5. Compile all of the passages assigned to each of the main categories

6. Determine sub-categories
7. Second coding process: code all of the data using the elaborated category system
8. Category-based analysis and presentation of result

(Kuckartz, 2014, p. 70)

The qualitative data analysis conducted in this study followed these procedures above. As the written data was collected before the interviews, it was analysed first as well, using MAXQDA software.

The constructs in the questionnaires (see Table 3-08) were established to help answering my research questions. Students' written data from the questionnaire was also prompted by evaluating statements and many of them replied using the language used in the questionnaire statements, so my initial categories for analysing the written data were the constructs of my questionnaire: benefits of working in groups, benefits of multicultural group work, assessment preference, challenges mentioned in managing the group work process, and challenges they faced regarding working in multicultural groups. I started the first round of the deductive coding process using the above five categories. However, I was not using these categories as the only possible themes. I coded the relevant data into smaller themes that fitted into the five categories, and also developed new themes that did not belong to the original categories by a process of inductive coding. For example, the theme patience (see chapter 5, section 5.2.3) was not one of the initial categories. So, in other words, what I did in the first round of coding was to code inductively using the categories, but also develop new themes based on the inductive coding.

Code System	474	1: Answer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ difficult but worth it</li> <li>□ more patience</li> <li>□ no change</li> <li>□ group work skills</li> <li>□ little change</li> <li>□ no change</li> <li>▶ Skills development</li> <li>▶ positive</li> <li>□ no change in attitude</li> <li>▶ improved attitude</li> <li>▶ benefits of working in groups</li> <li>▶ Negative attitudes</li> <li>□ no experience before warwick</li> <li>▶ dynamics of groups</li> <li>▶ Workplace teamwork vs student projects</li> <li>□ Chinese</li> <li>□ No problems</li> <li>▶ previous groupwork experience</li> <li>▶ native English speakers' attitude</li> <li>□ negative</li> <li>□ assessment of groupwork</li> <li>▶ Cultural difference</li> <li>□ Not cultural differences</li> <li>□ little change</li> <li>□ no language barriers</li> <li>□ occasional incompatible cultural views</li> <li>□ too much group work on the course</li> <li>□ mono cultural group's disadvantage</li> <li>□ mixed groups isn't an issue</li> <li>□ similar culture-efficient</li> </ul>	<p>1 improved attitude</p> <p>1 ..learn different ideas/perspectives</p> <p>1 ..mixed-culture group work is good in</p> <p>64 ..observation of other group member</p> <p>60 ..difficult group member</p> <p>48 ..meet people from other cultures and</p> <p>30 improved attitude</p> <p>93 ..personal development-confidence etc.</p> <p>14 improved attitude</p> <p>8 ..learn about other cultures</p> <p>11 ..learn different ideas/perspectives</p> <p>6 ..learn different ideas/perspectives</p> <p>6 ..individual's nature and attitude mat</p> <p>5 ..communication issues</p> <p>5 ..difficulties could be overcome</p> <p>3 previous groupwork experience</p> <p>4 benefits of working in groups</p> <p>3 ..learn different ideas/perspectives</p> <p>1 ..more open to listen and understand</p> <p>1 ..difficult at beginning</p> <p>1 ..right group members add value</p>	<p>198 I enjoy more groupworks than I did before because its a way of interacting with others and learning more.</p> <p>199</p> <p>200 I was open to the idea, excited to meet people from other cultural backgrounds, but sometimes I felt that communication was lost with people from some countries! not all. Students from some countries are more compatible with others but very different from other ones. the most difficult part though is dealing with some character's.</p> <p>201 I am grateful that I have developed a number of relationships with really interesting people from around the globe, and overall, my attitude towards mixed-culture groupwork has changed greatly for the better.</p> <p>202 Improved</p> <p>203 Working in a mixed-culture group helps you to understand the different cultures and their view about things, which is interesting to know. This experience sometimes helps in broadening your understanding, way of thinking and outlook about different things.</p> <p>204 Initially, my thinking was working with different cultured people will help me to escalate my knowledge. And it is still 100% true. But more than that, I have realised it is not the culture but the person's nature which is more important in the group work. Many times it does create communication issues, but if the group members are ready to cooperate, then the same could be overcome very easily.</p> <p>205</p> <p>206 I used to work with students from other cultures within the country. That was good as well. However, working with international students is a God send. I now have friends in at least 20 countries, and now can understand why they think the way they think. Obviously one cannot go to all the countries and learn their customs and cultures. Working with mixed culture has given me the perspective to see a situation differently and how it impacts people of multiple faith, culture and socio economic background.</p> <p>207 More open to listen and understand others point of view.</p> <p>208 I realised that working in groups is more difficult than I thought first, but having the right group members and working with them can provide an added value to the final work.</p>

Figure 3-01 Coding process in MAXQDA

Figure 3-01 is a screenshot of the coding process that I completed in MAXQDA. On the right is the original data from participants' written answers. In the middle section, the table shows the original codes I developed in the first round of coding. And the left section is the code systems, showing the frequencies of different codes I generated.

When the first round of coding was finished, I examined the codes that were already coded according to the original categories and also the ones that I developed when I coded inductively. After comparing the codes and the smaller themes I created, I combined, merged and synthesised results from both coding procedures.

Figure 3-02 below is the flow chart of my coding process.

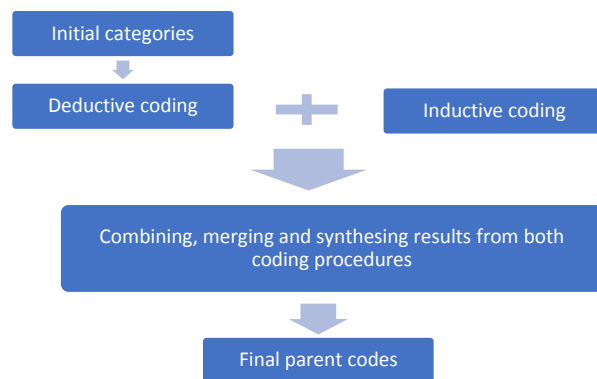


Figure 3-02: Flow chart of coding process

Initial categories are based on the constructs from the questionnaires, which was how the statements were grouped in quantitative data analysis:

Table 3-11: Initial categories and deductive codes

Initial categories	Deductive codes
Students' recognition of values of working in groups (Benefits of group work)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ beneficial to work in groups</li> <li>▪ share ideas and knowledge</li> <li>▪ group work - in class discussion</li> <li>▪ group work is informative</li> <li>▪ learn different ideas/perspectives</li> </ul>
Preference of being assessed individually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ lack of efficiency for assessed work</li> </ul>
Students' recognition of values of multicultural group work (Benefits of multicultural group work)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ learn about other cultures</li> <li>▪ meet people from other cultures and learn about them</li> <li>▪ multicultural group work is enjoyable</li> </ul>
Challenges for multicultural group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ language barrier</li> <li>▪ increase amount of conflict</li> <li>▪ different culture-different communication styles</li> <li>▪ difficulties in interacting effectively</li> </ul>
Challenges in managing group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ different working styles</li> <li>▪ group work is difficult</li> <li>▪ communication issues</li> <li>▪ personality difference</li> <li>▪ group work is stressful</li> <li>▪ workload divided uneven</li> <li>▪ group work- fairness and participation</li> </ul>

After the first round of coding, smaller themes were developed. Table 3-12 provided some examples of the themes that were coded in this part of analysis.

Table 3-12: Examples of themes produced by inductive coding

Inductive codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ personal growth</li> <li>▪ more open to listen and understand</li> <li>▪ patience</li> <li>▪ be more open minded</li> <li>▪ understanding others more</li> <li>▪ understand the challenges in group work better</li> <li>▪ difficult at beginning</li> <li>▪ difficulties could be overcome</li> </ul>

Based on the themes created, parent codes were generated from grouping the small themes. Here is an example:

Table 3-13 Initial parent codes

Parent code	Codes
Benefits of multicultural group work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ learn different ideas/perspectives</li> <li>▪ meet people from other cultures and learn about them</li> <li>▪ beneficial to work in groups</li> <li>▪ learn about other cultures</li> <li>▪ multicultural group work is enjoyable</li> <li>▪ share ideas and knowledge</li> <li>▪ group work in-class discussion</li> <li>▪ group work is informative</li> <li>▪ cultural experts helping academic study</li> </ul>

Table 3-14 is the list of the final parent codes that were generated from the small themes, and they will be used in reporting the qualitative analysis in chapter 5.

Table 3-14: Final parent codes generated from small themes

Final parent codes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Benefits of multicultural group work</li> <li>▪ Skills development</li> <li>▪ Positive attitudes</li> <li>▪ Difficulties in multicultural group work</li> <li>▪ No change in attitudes</li> <li>▪ Improved attitudes</li> <li>▪ Personal development</li> <li>▪ Group dynamic and relationships</li> <li>▪ Group work design</li> </ul>

These new categories were applied to code the documents again, to make sure that they represented the data well.

Parent code	Code	Coded segme...
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	personality difference might cause communication issues	1
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	worried about negative stereotypes	1
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	workload divided uneven	1
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	non native English pronunciations	2
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	lack of efficiency for assess work	1
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	language barrier	15
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	increase amount of conflict	1
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	group work- fairness and participation	1
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	groupwork is stressful	1
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	group work is difficult	7
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	difficulties in interacting effectively	4
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	difficulties could be overcome	1
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	difficult at beginning	4
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	difficult group member	4
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	different working styles	5
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	different culture-different communication styles	2
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	being outcasted in a group	2
● Difficulties/problems in groupwork	communication issues	1
●	Personal development	0
● Personal development	understanding others more	2
● Personal development	understand the challenges in groupwork better	1
● Personal development	more open to listen and understand	3
● Personal development	personal deveopment-confidence etc.	13
● Personal development	patience	3
● Personal development	be more open minded	3

Figure 3-03: Categories derived from smaller themes

Figure 3-03 is an example of new categories that were created based on the smaller themes. This concludes the reporting of the procedure for analysing the written data from questionnaires.

### 3.6.3 Use of quantitative data in the qualitative data collection

As explained earlier, the interviews were transcribed to perform thematic analysis. The transcription was focused on the content. So, the themes that were developed from the written data were also used for analysing the interview data, especially because, in the second round of interviews, the participants were shown their own questionnaire data, and they were asked to comment on the statements as well as why they scored in specific ways. In order to triangulate the interview data with the questionnaire statements, I produced EXCEL tables instead using MAXQDA to analyse and compare participants' comments on the same statements and constructs. The interviewees were only asked to comment on selected statements, and that was because it was not possible to ask all of them to comment on all the statements (more than 30) within a reasonable time. This section is only part of the semi-structured interviews questions. So, when I produced individual questionnaire data table for each of my participants, I pre-selected the statements for them to

comment on. Figure 3-04 is an example of the data I showed to my participants in the interview.

			Term1	Term3
			Mean	Mean
Working with students from other cultures helps me to understand the wider world community	6	6	4.8811	5.1527
Interacting with peers for group assignments enriches my knowledge and understanding of my	6	6	4.6503	4.7939
It is difficult to reach a consensus when working on group assignments.	3	4	3.6421	3.6412
My group mates would drag my score down if we were assessed as a group.	3	3	2.9824	3.0154
Working in mixed-culture groups interferes with my academic development.	2	2	2.6972	2.4427
Doing assignments in groups increases the probability of conflict among group members.	2	3	3.4755	3.7077
Group assignments provide opportunities to get useful feedback on one's understanding of the topic.	5	5	4.4545	4.4769
Finding a time to meet or an effective way to communicate for group assignments is difficult.	3	4	3.7684	3.9
Group assignments should be assessed on an individual basis.	3	3	3.5333	3.4427
Working in mixed-culture groups is a great chance for non-native speakers to practise English-speaking skills.	6	6	4.8375	4.9
Cooperating with the other members of the group for the purpose of working on assignments is	3	5	3.2968	3.2077
Working with students from other first language backgrounds makes me reluctant to communicate.	1	2	2.4205	2.1231
Students from a similar cultural background to myself respond better to me than students from a different cultural background.	5	2	3.4175	3.4504
Tutors should systematically mix local and international students for group assignments.	4	6	4.539	4.0153
Interacting with peers from different cultural backgrounds enriches my knowledge and understanding of my subject.	6	6	4.5754	4.6107
Group assignments provide valuable opportunities to learn from my peers' contributions.	6	5	4.7834	4.9055

Figure 3-04: Example of individual responses highlighted for use as a prompt in interview

As can be seen in Figure 3-04, I highlighted the statements so that it was obvious to the participants which statements saw a change of scores from Term 1 to Term 3, which are the statements on which they scored rather differently compared to the average mean of the entire participant population. The change and difference were then used as questions to ask them to comment on their own attitudes about the topics of the statements. Because each participant had different questions in this section of their semi-structured interviews, I produced an overview of how many participants commented on the same statements and also if their opinions were similar or different. I used tables to gather and divide all the interview data according to the statements they were asked to comment on. Table 3-12 is an example of how I cross-examined the interviews.

Table 3-15: Example of cross-examination of interview data

Many non-native speakers don't speak English well enough to be able to function properly.	R: That's a very mean statement.		Many non-native speakers don't speak English well enough to be able to function properly. R: Yes. Int: For example? R: For example, they want to say the idea but they're struggling in English so I just say, "I think you should write that down" and when they write it down, oh that's	many man speakers don't speak English well enough to be able to function properly, so for you, because it's quite low and they're actually lower than like other respondent on average, so you never come across any problems about like people don't speak English well enough? R: No. I wouldn't say so, but	That's actually relating to this statement, to function properly, because that's actually quite often reported in literature, saying that international students, their English is not good enough for them to communicate with us. As a native speaker, so you're against this idea, yes?	Many non-native speakers don't speak English well enough to be able to function properly? R: I can't believe I said I disagree strongly, yes, I agree strongly on this term. I don't know how some people function in this country, I started working as a library		I would agree also on that, maybe I would not assess it that much unless I were super angry. But there are times when for example when I write something and I'm not sure, I Google it and I see how it's written. You know Word underlines my whole line in my words I would see	Int: Many non-native speakers don't speak English well enough to be able to function properly. You kind of agree with it in the first term but I think the second term, you disagree with it? R: Yes, because I guess I got to work with more open cultures. In the first time, as I said, I'd come from my
Students from a similar cultural background to myself respond better to me than students from a different cultural background.	This is the communication styles, it's because I feel more comfortable and this is horrible but just the way it is but I mean ... similar cultural background, well this is a very difficult question because for example, with you, I don't ever feel like I respond to you worse than somebody who's from Switzerland but maybe somebody else who's from a different cultural background, it would indeed be, this is a difficult question, somebody would respond better to me, you know?	Int: Students from a similar cultural background respond to myself better to me than students from a different cultural background, and you disagree with that. R: I feel that at least I'm so comfortable today, like regardless of the culture encountered, usually in a mixed group, I don't find that anyone would respond differently regardless and then the thing is that my nationality, Finns are	Int: Students from a similar cultural background to myself respond better to me than students from a different cultural background, you are dropping the score, is there anything happened there? R: At first yeah, but I think I make a mistake on that but let's say no, even though we have same background, we can have different kind of perspective like I've been here almost a year and right now they understand	"A student from a similar cultural background to myself responds better to me than students from a different cultural background"? R: Oh that's why there's... Int: That drops like a lot, yeah, now what do you think? R: Because I know that in the first term they were quite behind, one of the students that I worked more with than the other ones was from a similar background, but then		Int: Students from similar cultural backgrounds to myself respond better to me than students from a different cultural background? R: Yes, it's what I'm saying, if you're aggressive, if you're assertive in the way you're talking, some cultures shut down whereas other respond with the same thing and that's when consensus	R: Again, I disagree with this because I strongly believe in individuals rather than culture. I know this is not the answer that you want but then that's how I feel about it. Because I have seen people that, OK, let's assume there are two people from the same culture, I may get along very well with one person but not the other so the culture doesn't really play a part there.		
Group assignments should be assessed on an individual basis.	I thought a lot about this because when we were doing the international business, I thought it should be assessed individually and I was really considering talking to Daniel, to get it assessed individually but in the end I decided not to so that's probably why I said I don't think it should be assessed individually because I thought a lot about it, but then I decided not to ask Daniel to do that so ... Int: Why? R: Because I think it's	Int: Group assignments should be assessed on an individual basis. R: Yes, it is the responsibility of the group, right, so even in my experience, the bad one, if the final product is wrong, it's also my own fault that I didn't speak up earlier and tell my team members that there needed to be an improvement, so you cannot really blame one person or a couple of persons for a bad final project. That's why I disagreed to the statement.	Int: Group assignments should be assessed on an individual basis, you completely disagree. R: It's a group assignment so it has to be assessed ... Int: Do you always just do presentations or you need to hand in something for the teachers to grade? R: No, we just do presentation. There is no personal peer assessment, no. Int: So you wouldn't worry that somebody would drag your		. So group assignments should be assessed on the individual basis. R: Yeah. That is a very interesting one, and I've always kind of, I think it's a catch 22. I don't know if that's an American phrase or not. Int: I hear a lot of, even Wikipedia, they're just trying to figure out what's going - R: Do you know what it is? Int: It's more of a, okay		I'm not sure, OK, maybe I was thinking I don't see how this can be done. How is it possible to assess an individual's contribution to group work? If I had an answer to that then maybe my response would change.		Int: So it wasn't a problem for you at all, brilliant. Group assignments should be assessed on an individual basis, you strongly disagree with? R: Yes, because I don't think... when you divided up the work, not everybody is going to be the same level of difficulty. It cannot be assessed on that because let's say I took on a part of the project which had less



### 3.7 Information about participants

#### 3.7.1 Descriptive statistics of the quantitative data

Figure below is the distribution of master's degree students at the University of Warwick in the 2014-2015 academic year.

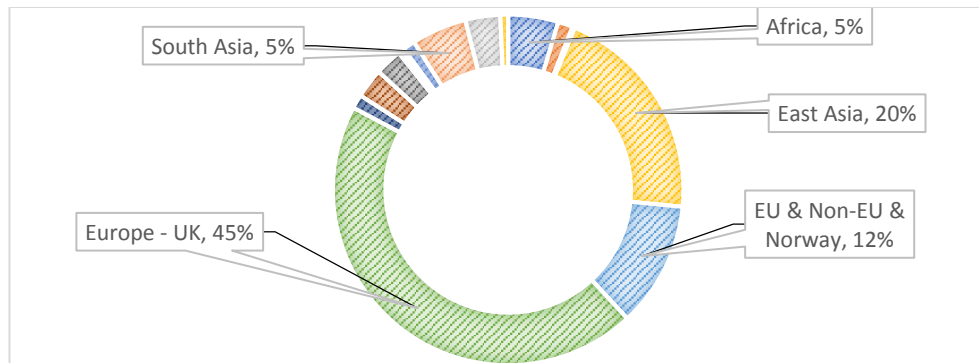


Figure 3-05: Distribution of master's degree students by origin in 2014-15

In total, 287 students from 66 different countries participated in this study. The respondent rate is not available to be provided here because there was no record of how many master's degree students of 2014-2015 were reached by emails. However, the distribution of the participants' nationalities is consistent with the overall sample (See Figure 3.05 above).

Table 3-16 Term 1 respondents by region

Valid	Frequency	Percent
UK	56	19.5
China	73	25.4
EEA (excl. UK)	46	16.0
Other	112	39.0
Total	287	100.0

Table 3.16 is a summary of the participant population. The participants are mainly from China (25.4%), UK (19.5%), EEA countries (excluding UK) (16%), and the rest of them (39%) are from other areas. Based on the participants' demographics,

the categories shown in Table 3.16 were created for the analysis. These categories will be used in further analysis and will be referred to as different regions in group comparisons.

In Term 3, 126 respondents from 44 countries filled in the second questionnaire. As only respondents from Questionnaire Term 1 were invited again, the respondent rate, 44%, was able to be recorded. Table 3-17 below shows that the participants are mainly from UK (22.2%), China (19%), EEA countries (excluding UK) (22.2%), and the rest (34.1%) are from other areas. As in Questionnaire Term 1, these categories will also be used in further analysis.

Table 3-17 Term 3 respondents by region

Valid	Frequency	Percent
UK	28	22.2
CHINA	24	19.0
EEA (excl.UK)	28	22.2
OTHER	43	34.1
Total	123	97.6
Missing	3	2.4
Total	126	100.0

Figure 3-06 below shows the comparison of respondents from different regions in Term 1 and Term 3.

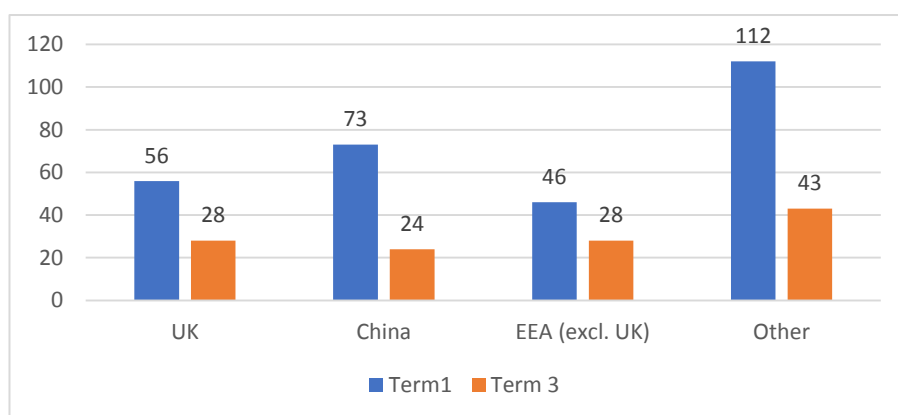


Figure 3-06 Comparison of respondents by region in Term 1 and Term 3

Table 3-18 shows the age distribution of the participants: 57% of the participants were in age group 20-25, of which 46 participants were 22 years old and 60 of them were 23. It is likely that most of them had limited working experience before starting their master's degrees.

Table 3-18 Term 1 respondents by age group

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	20-25	163	57.0
	26-30	43	15.0
	31-35	30	10.5
	36-53	40	14.0
	Missing	10	3.5
	Total	286	100%

Table 3-19 below shows the age distribution of the participants in Term 3: 69 out of 127 the participants were in age group 20-25. In the first age group, which is also the largest one, 13 participants were 22 years old and 30 of them were 23. They are more likely to have had limited working experience before starting their master's degrees. It means that my participants are mainly students who were pursuing postgraduate studies right after their undergraduate degree. As for the rest of the population, students who are in the 26 and above category are more likely to have working experience outside of their studies.

Table 3-19 Term 3 questionnaire respondents by age

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	20-25	69	54.7
	26-30	23	18.3
	31-35	15	11.9
	36-53	14	11.1
	Missing	5	4.0
	Total	126	100%

Figure 3-07 below is a comparison of the age of Term 1 and Term 3 respondents.

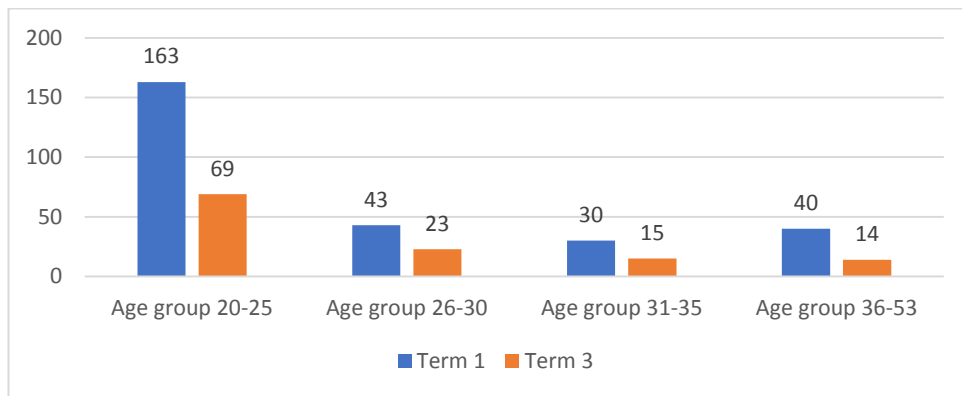


Figure 3-07: Term 1 and Term 3 respondents by age

In Term 1, 59% of my participants identified themselves as female (170 out of 286), and 40% as male (114 out of 286), and 1% of the participants (3 out of 286) chose not to disclose information about their gender (see Figure 3-08 below).

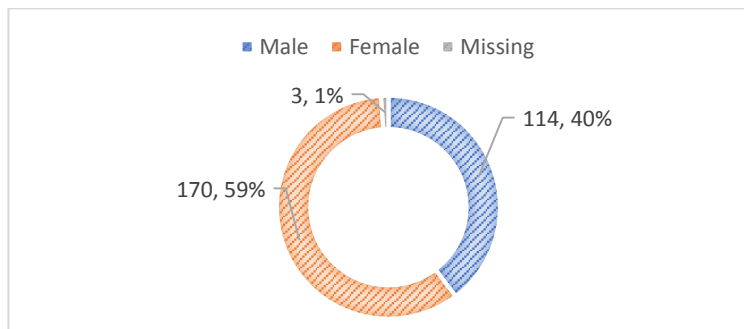


Figure 3-08: Term 1 Questionnaire participants by gender

Of the participants in the Term 3 questionnaire, 63% were female (80 out of 126), 35% were male (44 out of 126), and 2% (2 out of 126) participants didn't want to disclose information about their gender. In this study, gender was not found to have an impact on the findings (See Figure 3-09 below).

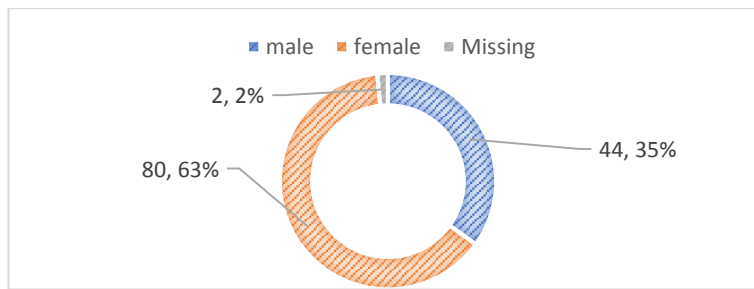


Figure 3-09: Term 3 Questionnaire participants by gender

Figure 3-10 shows the comparison of Term 1 and Term 3 respondents by gender.

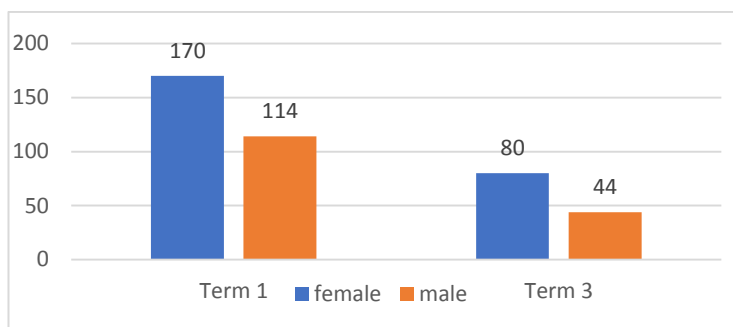


Figure 3-10 Term 1 and Term 3 Questionnaire participants by gender

### 3.7.2 Interview participants

Participants were allocated pseudonyms as shown in Table 3-20.

Table 3-20 Interview participants

<u>Participant ID</u>	<u>Pseudonym</u>	<u>Nationality</u>	<u>First Language</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Discipline</u>
<u>I01</u>	Heidi	Swiss	German	25	F	Social Science
<u>I02</u>	Anneli	Finnish	Finnish/Swedish	24	F	Business
<u>I03</u>	Leo	Indonesian	Indonesian	23	M	Business
<u>I04</u>	Siri	Norwegian	Norwegian	25	F	Social Science
<u>I05</u>	Jaime	American	English	22	F	Social Science
<u>I06</u>	Ivanka	Armenia	Armenian/Russian	20	F	Arts
<u>I07</u>	Dhisha	Indian	Tamil	N/A	F	Business
<u>I08</u>	Zhenya	Bulgarian	Bulgarian	24	F	Social Science
<u>I09</u>	Katie	Kenyan	English/Kikuyu	24	F	Business
<u>I10</u>	Parvati	Indian	English/Hindu	27	F	Business
<u>I11</u>	Xiaobai	Chinese	Chinese	23	F	Social Science
<u>I12</u>	Shengjiang	Chinese	Chinese	22	F	Social Science
<u>I13</u>	Yi	Chinese	Chinese	22	F	Social Science
<u>I14</u>	Jun	Chinese	Chinese	25	F	Social Science
<u>I15</u>	Wei	Chinese	Chinese	24	M	Interdisciplinary
<u>I16</u>	Xiaomi	Chinese	Chinese	23	F	Interdisciplinary
<u>I17</u>	Chuju	Chinese	Chinese	23	F	Business
<u>I18</u>	Jingjing	Chinese	Chinese	23	F	Interdisciplinary
<u>I19</u>	Ling	Chinese	Chinese	25	F	Social Science

## 4 Quantitative analysis and discussion

This chapter deals firstly with the analysis and discussion of data from Questionnaire Term 1, and then with Questionnaire Term 3, including descriptive statistics of valid constructs, correlation of the constructs and exploration of factors influencing students' attitudes towards their experience of working in groups and multicultural groups. It concludes with a longitudinal comparison of the same respondents' answers in Term 1 and Term 3.

### 4.1 Term 1 questionnaire: Descriptive statistics of valid constructs and their correlations

#### 4.1.1 Descriptive statistics of valid constructs

Table 4-01 below shows the details of descriptive statistics for the 5 established constructs in the analysis of Questionnaire Term 1.

As the table shows, the two constructs *Benefits of group work* (mean=4.74) and *Benefits of multicultural group work* (mean=4.76) have means higher than 3.5 (on a 6-point Likert scale). It indicates that the participants in this study recognised very well the benefits of group work in general, and valued the benefits of working in mixed groups. The construct *Preference of being assessed individually* has a mean of 3.2, which is very close to 3.5, and more than 50% of the participants scored 3 and lower. It shows that students did not prefer to be assessed on an individual basis. The construct *Challenges of multicultural group work* has a mean of 2.75, which is lower than 3.5, and 75% of the participants scored 3.5 and lower. This is a construct consisting of statements about the challenges of working in mixed groups in respect of different languages and cultures. Most of the students disagreed with those statements, which means different languages and cultures were not perceived as particular barriers to working in multicultural groups. The construct *Challenges in managing group work* has a mean of 3.6, which is only slightly above 3.5, and 50% of the participants scored 3.6 and below. It shows that the students have very diverse perceptions of the challenges in working in groups, but are still more likely to agree with the difficulties of working in groups in general.

Table 4-01 Descriptive statistics for the 5 constructs in Term 1 responses

	N		Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Variance	Percentiles		
	Valid	Missing					25	50	75
Benefits of group work	286	1	4.7388	4.8000	.88485	.783	4.4000	4.8000	5.4000
Benefits of multicultural group work	286	1	4.7591	4.8889	.80411	.647	4.3125	4.8889	5.3333
Preference of being assessed individually	286	1	3.1766	3.0000	1.09143	1.191	2.3333	3.0000	4.0000
Challenges in managing group work	286	1	3.6295	3.6000	.94644	.896	3.0000	3.6000	4.4000
Challenges of multicultural group work	285	2	2.7477	2.7500	1.10282	1.216	2.0000	2.7500	3.5000



#### 4.1.2 Correlations of constructs

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationships among these 5 constructs. Table 4-02 shows all the statistically significant correlations in the data.

There was a positive correlation between Benefits of group work and Benefits of multicultural group work ( $r = .778$ ,  $n = 286$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This positive correlation indicates that students who recognised the benefits of working in groups also recognised the value of working in multicultural groups. A positive correlation also found between Challenges in managing group work and Preference of being assessed individually ( $r = .431$ ,  $n = 286$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This correlation suggests that the students who found it more challenging working with others in *group work* in general would prefer to be assessed individually.

Significant negative correlations were found between Benefits of group work and Preference of being assessed individually ( $r = -.364$ ,  $n = 285$ ,  $p = .000$ ); Benefits of multicultural group work and Challenges of multicultural group work ( $r = -.398$ ,  $n = 285$ ,  $p = .000$ ); and between Benefits of multicultural group work and Preference of being assessed individually ( $r = -.372$ ,  $n = 286$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Both Benefits of group work and Benefits of multicultural group work were negatively correlated with Preference of being assessed individually, so students who showed recognition of the benefits of working in groups and in multicultural groups did not prefer to be assessed on an individual basis. The negative correlation between Benefits of multicultural group work and Challenges of multicultural group work indicates that students who recognised the benefits of multicultural group work would be likely to find it less challenging to work in multicultural groups. Also, the students who did not find multicultural group work as challenging would see more benefits of working in multicultural groups.

Based on the correlations above, it could be concluded that students who generally enjoy working in groups with others regardless of where are the group members are from would also benefit more from multicultural group work; they would praise the benefits of diversity more and want to be assessed as a whole group. The students who found working in groups with others is generally difficult would also prefer to be assessed based on their individual performance. It seems like the preference for

being assessed in one way or another has no relationship to whether the group is mixed or not, but rather relates to a student's own liking of group work as a learning activity.

Table 4-02 Statistically significant correlations among constructs in Term 1 responses

		Benefits of group work	Benefits of multicultural group work	Challenges of multicultural group work	Challenges in managing group work
Benefits of multicultural group work	Pearson Correlation	.778**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000			
	N	286			
Challenges of multicultural group work	Pearson Correlation	-.283**	-.398**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		
	N	285	285		
Challenges in managing group work	Pearson Correlation	-.276**	-.264**	.297**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	286	286	285	
Preference of being assessed individually	Pearson Correlation	-.364**	-.372**	.200**	.431**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.001	.000
	N	286	286	285	286

## 4.2 Term 1 questionnaire: Factors affecting students' attitudes

In this section, the data from Questionnaire Term 1 will be divided into smaller groups in order to find out what factors have an influence on their attitudes towards MGW. There are two main factors explored in this study, which are where the students are from and what their first languages are. Respondents were therefore divided into regional groups based on their nationality and also if they native English speakers or not based on self-report data about their first languages.

### 4.2.1 Regions

As explained in the methodology chapter, four categories of regions were created based on students' nationalities. The following tables provide an overview of how students from different regions scored in each construct (See Table 4-03, Table 4-04, Table 4-5, and Table 4-6). Figure 4-01 below provides a concise view of the comparisons of the regional group statistics in Term 1.

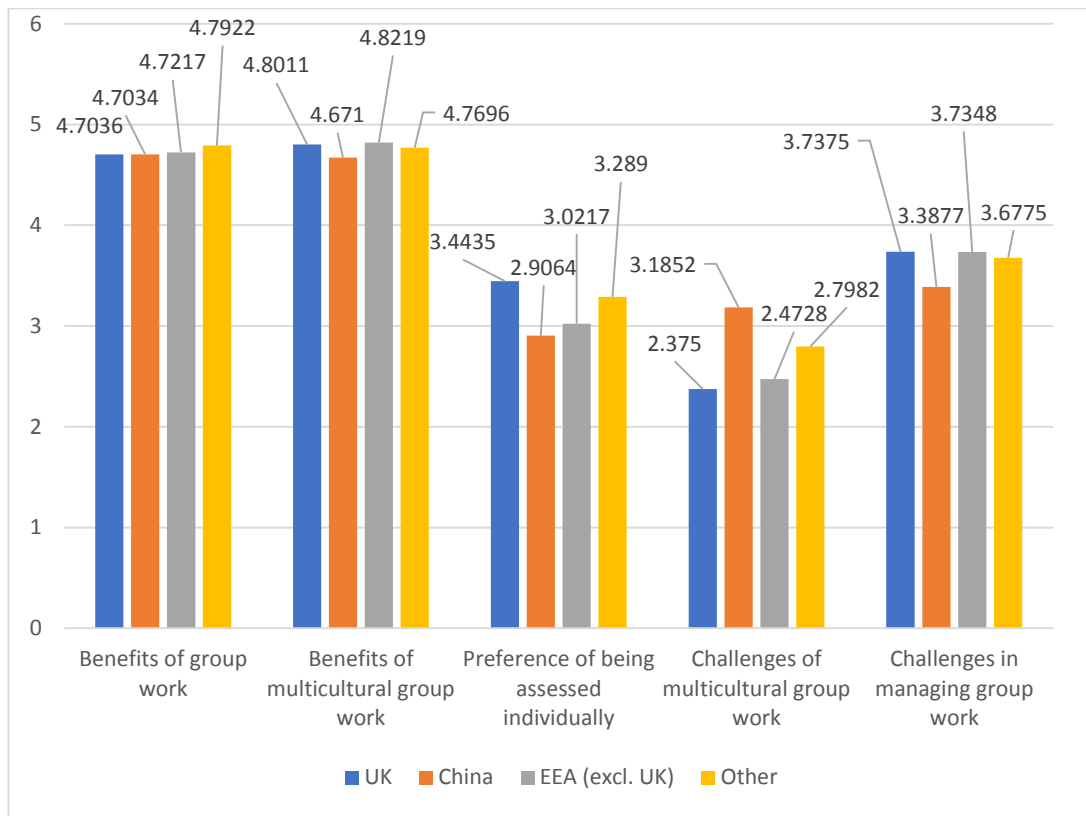


Figure 4-01 Comparison of regional group statistics for Term 1 responses

Table 4-03 Region statistics for UK in Term 1

	N		Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Variance	Percentiles		
	Valid	Missing					25	50	75
Benefits of group work	56	0	4.7036	4.8000	.83360	.695	4.2500	4.8000	5.3500
Benefits of multicultural group work	56	0	4.8011	4.8333	.74424	.554	4.3333	4.8333	5.4167
Preference of being assessed individually	56	0	3.4435	3.3333	1.14956	1.321	2.6667	3.3333	4.3333
Challenges in managing group work	56	0	3.7375	3.8000	.89469	.800	3.2000	3.8000	4.4000
Challenges of multicultural group work	56	0	2.3750	2.2500	1.00454	1.009	1.5000	2.2500	3.0000

Table 4-04 Region statistics for China in Term 1

	N		Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Variance	Percentiles		
	Valid	Missing					25	50	75
Benefits of group work	73	0	4.7034	4.8000	.74407	.554	4.4000	4.8000	5.2000
Benefits of multicultural group work	73	0	4.6710	4.6667	.65472	.429	4.1111	4.6667	5.2222
Preference of being assessed individually	73	0	2.9064	3.0000	.90820	.825	2.3333	3.0000	3.3333
Challenges in managing group work	73	0	3.3877	3.4000	.84396	.712	3.0000	3.4000	3.9000
Challenges of multicultural group work	72	1	3.1852	3.2500	.93836	.881	2.5000	3.2500	3.7500

Table 4-05 Region statistics for EEA (excluding UK) in Term 1

	N		Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Variance	Percentiles		
	Valid	Missing					25	50	75
Benefits of group work	46	0	4.7217	5.0000	1.06122	1.126	4.0000	5.0000	5.4000
Benefits of multicultural group work	46	0	4.8219	5.0000	.91232	.832	4.2222	5.0000	5.4722
Preference of being assessed individually	46	0	3.0217	2.6667	1.14483	1.311	2.3333	2.6667	4.0000
Challenges in managing group work	46	0	3.7348	3.6000	.99336	.987	3.1500	3.6000	4.2000
Challenges of multicultural group work	46	0	2.4728	2.3750	.97785	.956	1.7500	2.3750	3.0000

Table 4-06 Region statistics for Other in Term 1

	N		Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Variance	Percentiles		
	Valid	Missing					25	50	75
Benefits of group work	109	0	4.7922	4.8000	.91493	.837	4.4000	4.8000	5.4000
Benefits of multicultural group work	109	0	4.7696	4.8889	.88060	.775	4.4097	4.8889	5.3333
Preference of being assessed individually	109	0	3.2890	3.3333	1.12369	1.263	2.3333	3.3333	4.0000
Challenges in managing group work	109	0	3.6775	3.8000	.97933	.959	3.0000	3.8000	4.4000
Challenges of multicultural group work	109	0	2.7982	2.7500	1.18998	1.416	1.7500	2.7500	3.5000

To further compare students' answers based on their regional background, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the four groups, which is represented in Table 4-07.

Table 4-07 Comparison of Term 1 responses by region

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Benefits of group work	Between Groups	.484	3	.161	.206	.892
	Within Groups	219.165	280	.783		
	Total	219.649	283			
Benefits of multicultural group work	Between Groups	.858	3	.286	.439	.725
	Within Groups	182.533	280	.652		
	Total	183.391	283			
Preference of being assessed individually	Between Groups	11.797	3	3.932	3.363	.019
	Within Groups	327.417	280	1.169		
	Total	339.215	283			
Challenges of multicultural group work	Between Groups	25.269	3	8.423	7.485	.000
	Within Groups	313.980	279	1.125		
	Total	339.249	282			
Challenges in managing group work	Between Groups	5.675	3	1.892	2.177	.091
	Within Groups	243.297	280	.869		
	Total	248.972	283			

According to the statistical calculations shown in Table 4-07, the regional difference only has impacts on *Challenges of multicultural group work* (sig. =0.000) and *Preference of being assessed individually* (sig. =0.019). Therefore, an independent sample t-test was carried out to further explore the difference. In order to identify which groups differed in which way, I performed a pairwise comparison to shed more light on these significant findings. As a result of this procedure differences were identified as shown in Table 4-08 and Table 4-09.

Table 4-08 Differences in Term 1 scores by region for Challenges of multicultural group work

<i>Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 1)</i>	t	D	p
<b>UK</b> (M=2.38, SD=1.00) vs <b>China</b> (M=3.19, SD=0.94)	-4.70	126	0.000
<b>UK</b> (M=2.38, SD=1.00) vs <b>Other</b> (M=2.80, SD=1.19)	-2.28	163	0.024
<b>China</b> (M=3.19, SD=0.94) vs <b>EEA (excl. UK)</b> (M=2.47, SD=0.98)	3.96	116	0.000
<b>China</b> (M=3.19, SD=0.94) vs <b>Other</b> (M=2.80, SD=1.19)	2.32	179	0.021

Table 4-09 Differences in Term 1 scores by region for Preference of being assessed individually

<i>Preference of being assessed individually (Term 1)</i>	t	d	p
<b>UK</b> (M=3.44, SD=1.15) vs <b>China</b> (M=2.90, SD=0.91)	-2.97	127	0.004
<b>Other</b> (M=3.29, SD=1.12) vs <b>China</b> (M=2.90, SD=0.91)	-2.43	180	0.016

Table 4-08 above shows that although all the students scored less than 3.5 on a 6-point Likert scale for a construct describing the different difficulties of working in multicultural groups as reported in the literature, meaning that they did not perceived the challenges of multicultural group work as negative, Chinese students scored (M=3.19) higher than the rest of the participant population (UK, M=2.38; EEA (excl.UK), M=2.47 and Other, M=2.80). This means that Chinese students found it more difficult to deal with the challenges they encountered in multicultural group work.

As shown in Table 4-09, in the construct *Preference of being assessed individually* Chinese students (M=2.90) scored lower than students from UK (M=3.44) and students from regional group Other (M=3.29). Combined with data on students from group EEA (excl.UK) (M=3.02) (see Table 4-05), it can be concluded that among all the students, Chinese students showed a stronger preference to be assessed on the performance of the whole group than students from other regions. In conclusion, even though Chinese students find it more difficult to work in multicultural groups, they still prefer MGW to be assessed based on the performance of the whole group.

#### 4.2.2 Native English speakers and non-native English speakers

In this section, participants are divided into two groups to compare their scores: Native English speakers (L1) and Non-native English speakers (L2). In the questionnaire, students filled in their own first language or languages. This question was an open-ended one so that students could identify English as one of their own first languages or not. All students who indicated that English is their first language or among their first languages were considered as Native English speakers (L1), and the rest of the participants who did not put English as part of their answer were considered Non-native English speakers (L2) in this study. Table 4-10 provides more details of the groups.

Table 4-10 Percentage of L1 and L2 English speakers in Term 1

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Native English speakers (L1)	85	29.7
Non-native English speakers (L2)	198	69.2
Missing	3	1.1
Total	286	100.0

Figure 4-02 shows the comparison of native and non-native English speakers' attitude scores in different constructs.

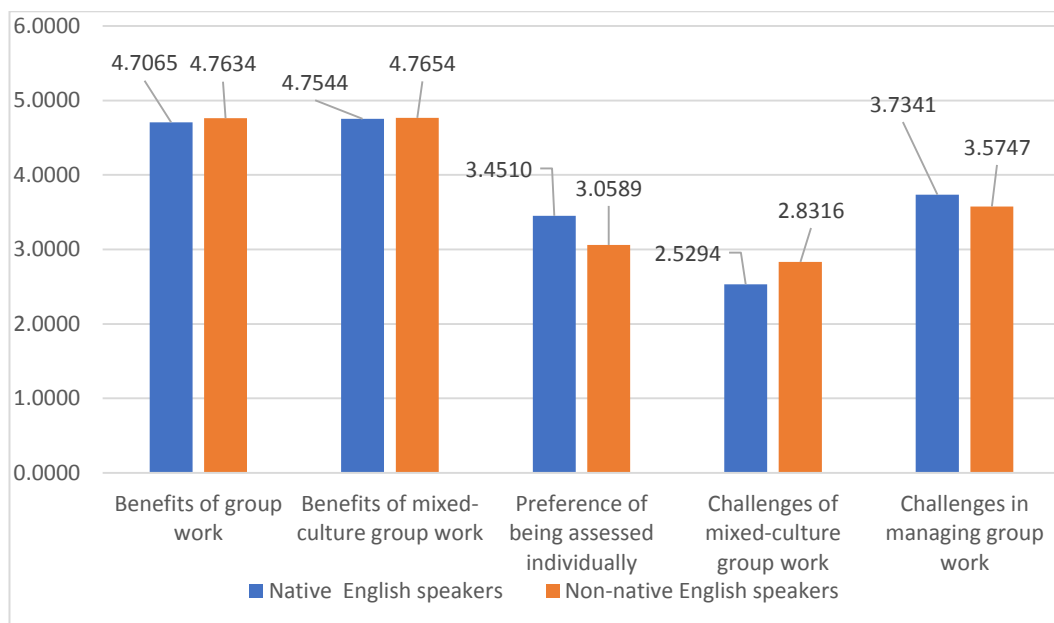


Figure 4-02 Comparison of L1 and L2 attitude scores in different constructs in Term 1 responses



To further compare students' answers based on the language difference, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the two groups of native and non-native English language speakers.

Table 4-11 Comparison of Term 1 responses by language group

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Benefits of group work	Between Groups	0.193	1	0.193	0.246	0.621
	Within Groups	220.396	281	0.784		
	Total	220.589	282			
Benefits of multicultural group work	Between Groups	0.007	1	0.007	0.011	0.916
	Within Groups	183.809	281	0.654		
	Total	183.816	282			
Challenges of multicultural group work	Between Groups	5.424	1	5.424	4.608	0.033
	Within Groups	329.579	280	1.177		
	Total	335.003	281			
Challenges in managing group work	Between Groups	1.510	1	1.510	1.720	0.191
	Within Groups	246.700	281	0.878		
	Total	248.210	282			
Preference of being assessed individually	Between Groups	9.141	1	9.141	7.994	0.005
	Within Groups	321.303	281	1.143		
	Total	330.444	282			

Table 4-11 reveals a statistically significant difference between native and non-native English speakers in the constructs *Challenges of multicultural group work* and *Preference of being assessed individually*. So, independent t-tests were carried out to further explore the difference between the groups.

Table 4-12 Difference between L1 and L2 scores in Term 1 for Challenges of multicultural group work and Preference of being assessed individually

	<b>Native English speakers vs Non-native English speakers</b>	t	df	p
Differences in scores of <i>Challenges of multicultural group work</i>	<b>L1</b> (M=2.53, SD=1.07) vs <b>L2 speakers</b> (M=2.83, SD=1.09)	-2.147	280	0.033
Differences in scores of <i>Preference of being assessed individually</i>	<b>L1</b> (M=3.45, SD=1.13) vs <b>L2</b> (M=3.06, SD=1.04)	2.827	281	0.005

As shown in Table 4-12 above, a statistically significant difference was found in the construct *Challenges of multicultural group work* between the scores for L1 (M=2.53, SD=1.07) and L2 (M=2.83, SD=1.09);  $t(280) = -2.147$ ,  $p = 0.033$ . This finding suggests that even though all participants scored less than 3.5, meaning that they disagree with the fact that multicultural group work is challenging, non-native English speakers scored higher than the native English speakers. It can be interpreted to mean that non-native English speakers found it more challenging when working in multicultural groups.

This finding that non-native English speakers' face more challenges in multicultural group work is consistent with the findings from previous research. In the literature, unequal English skills has been reported as the one of the challenges affecting students' experience of working in mixed groups (e.g. Turner, 2009). Similarly, non-native English speakers on postgraduate courses were found to struggle in oral interactions in academic settings (e.g. Hennebry, Lo, & Macaro, 2012); and Asian students have reported their frustrations in group work (e.g. Li & Campbell, 2008).

Another significant difference was found in the construct *Preference of being assessed individually* between the scores for L1 (M=3.45, SD=1.13) and L2 (M=3.06, SD=1.04);  $t(281) = 2.827$ ,  $p = 0.005$ . This finding suggested that native English speakers have a stronger preference for being assessed individually than non-native English speakers. This preference is consistent with the literature, for example, that L1 speakers consider L2 speakers to be less capable than they are themselves and bypass L2 students at the group formation stage (Leki, 2001). However, it is not consistent with other research in which international students were found to have a synergistic and positive effect on home students' individual

marks (De Vita, 2002) and perceived to be academically superior by academic staff (Trice, 2004).

In concluding the analysis of the Questionnaire Term 1 data, the findings have revealed that although Chinese students reported more difficulties when working in multicultural groups, they still prefer to be assessed as a whole group. This is consistent with the finding of non-native speakers struggling with multicultural group work, as Chinese students are a large group of international students who are non-native speakers. Hence, the finding that native speakers preferred to be assessed individually could possibly be explained as resulting from their seeing the difficulties that non-native students faced, perceiving this as a burden and worrying that non-native students' incompetence would drag the group's mark down. Questionnaire Term 1 data was collected at the end of Term 1, when many international students had only encountered multicultural group work for the first time, and I anticipated that it would be interesting to see if students had changed their attitudes and perceptions by Term 3.

As discussed in the Methodology section, this study set out to explore different variables that might have impacted on students' attitudes towards MGW. Four variables were considered as part of the questionnaire design: nationalities, first languages, disciplines, and courses. However, the data collected on disciplines and courses suggest that there is a large proportion of social sciences students in the participant population, many of whom were on interdisciplinary courses across departments. Therefore, the analysis of whether the courses and disciplines have an impact on students is not reported in this study as there was not sufficient data for any valid implications. Regions was a new factor established for analysing students' nationalities and its possible impact on students' attitudes towards MGW, as it is connected to students' prior experience and background before studying at this university. The criterion of regions takes into consideration the numbers of participants as well as examples reported in previous research (Spencer-Oatey and Dauber, 2016). As for the coding of native and non-native speakers, first languages was an open-ended question, where participants filled in their own answers. Only students who had answered English, or had English as one of their first languages, are coded as native speakers in this research. The rest of the participants are automatically considered to be non-native English speakers. The question about

first languages was set up this way to avoid deciding if someone is a native English speaker based on their nationality. As discussed in the Literature Review, students' previous living experience in different countries, their educational and professional backgrounds all have an impact on students' thought patterns, values and ways of communicating. In conclusion, regions and native English speakers/non-native English speakers were two non-related variables explored in the analysis of the Term 1 Questionnaire, contributing to the research question: What factors are perceived as influencing students' attitudes towards MGW?. This two variables will be explored again for the Term 3 Questionnaire as well as the comparison of students' attitudes in both questionnaires in the following sections.

#### 4.3 Term 3 questionnaire: Descriptive statistics of valid constructs and their correlations

##### 4.3.1 Descriptive statistics of valid constructs

Table 4-13 below provides detailed descriptive statistics for the 5 constructs in the analysis of Term 3 Questionnaire responses.

The two constructs *Benefits of group work (Term 3)* (mean=4.72) and *Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)* (mean=4.82) have means higher than 3.5 (on a 6-point Likert scale). It indicates that when the participants in this study were surveyed in Term 3 again, after all of their taught classes were over and MGW were completed, they maintained similar attitudes towards MGW, they still acknowledged the benefits of group work in general and valued the benefits of working in mixed groups as they did in Term 1.

*Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)* has a mean of 3.19, which is very close to 3.5, and more than 50% of the participants scored 3 and lower. It shows that in Term 3, students held the same attitude as before and most of them still didn't want to be assessed on an individual basis.

*Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)* has a mean of 3.63, which is only slightly above 3.5. Also 50% of the participants scored 3.60 and below. This

construct contains statements referring to the difficulties in MGW in previous research (Beebe & Masterson, 2014; Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003; Turner, 2009).

Table 4-13 Descriptive statistics for the 5 constructs in Term 3 responses.

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Minimum	Maximum	Percentiles		
	Valid	Missing						25	50	75
Benefits of group work (Term 3)	126	0	4.7230	0.94718	0.897	2.00	6.00	4.1500	5.0000	5.4000
Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)	126	0	4.8211	0.78047	0.609	2.00	6.00	4.3333	4.9444	5.4444
Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)	126	0	3.1931	1.19915	1.438	1.00	6.00	2.3333	3.0000	4.0000
Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)	126	0	3.6337	0.99198	0.984	1.00	6.00	3.0000	3.6000	4.4000
Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3)	126	0	2.5840	1.03899	1.079	1.00	6.00	1.9375	2.5000	3.2500

Agreeing with these statements means students also faced the same difficulties and found GW challenging. This mean of 3.63 is only just leaning towards agreeing, so it could be interpreted that the students had very diverse perceptions of the challenges of in working in groups, but were still more likely to agree with the difficulties of working in groups in general. How students perceived the challenges of managing GW and how they dealt with difficulties they encountered will be further discussed in the next chapter, which deals with the qualitative analysis and discussion.

Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3) has a mean of 2.58, which is lower than 3.5, and 75% of the participants scored 3.25 and lower, so the majority of the participants in this study disagreed with these statements. In this construct, the statements were about the challenges of working in mixed groups in respect of different languages and cultures as reported in the literature. Similar to their answer in Term 1, students' continuing disagreement with them shows that different languages and cultures were not perceived as serious barriers in working in multicultural groups.

#### **4.3.2 Correlations of constructs**

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationships among the 5 constructs in the Questionnaire Term 3 data. As Table 4-14 below displays, both positive and negative correlations were found among these constructs.

There was a significant positive correlation between Benefits of group work (Term 3) and Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3) ( $r = .791$ ,  $n = 126$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This strong positive correlation indicates that students who recognised the benefits of working in groups also recognised the value of working in multicultural groups. A positive correlation was also found between Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3) and Challenges in managing group work (Term 3) ( $r = .502$ ,  $n = 126$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This correlation suggests that the students who found it more challenging working with others in GW in general would prefer to be assessed individually. There is also a positive correlation between Challenges in managing group work (Term 3) and Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3) ( $r = .328$ ,  $n = 126$ ,  $p = .000$ ). This correlation suggests that the students who in general

found it more challenging working with others in GW are more likely to consider MGW more challenging as well.

Table 4-14 Relationships among constructs in Term 3 responses

		Benefits of group work (Term 3)	Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)	Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)	Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)
Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)	Pearson Correlation	.791**			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000			
	N	126			
Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)	Pearson Correlation	-.387**	-.338**		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		
	N	126	126		
Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)	Pearson Correlation	-.248**	-.314**	.502**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.005	0.000	0.000	
	N	126	126	126	
Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3)	Pearson Correlation	-.298**	-.526**	0.128	.328**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.000	0.153	0.000
	N	126	126	126	126

Four significant negative correlations were found between *Benefits of group work (Term 3)* and *Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)* ( $r = -.387$ ,  $n = 126$ ,  $p = .000$ ); between *Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)* and *Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)* ( $r = -.338$ ,  $n = 126$ ,  $p = .000$ ); between *Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)* and *Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)* ( $r = -.314$ ,  $n = 126$ ,  $p = .000$ ); and between *Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)* and *Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3)* ( $r = -.526$ ,  $n = 126$ ,  $p = .000$ ).

Both *Benefits of group work (Term 3)* and *Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)* were negatively correlated with *Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)*. This means that those who had higher scores on *Benefits of group work (Term 3)* and *Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)*, or in other words, those



who think GW generally has many benefits and MGW is also beneficial, would not want to be assessed on an individual basis. The two constructs *Challenges in managing group (Term 3)* and *Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3)* were negatively correlated with *Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)*. These two negative correlations suggested that students who generally found it challenging to work in groups with other people and those who found MGW difficult would think less favourably of the benefits that MGW could bring.

The analysis of data from Questionnaire Term 3 shows some minor changes in how students scored in each construct compared to their scores in Term 1. This longitudinal difference will be analysed and discussed later, in section 4.5.

#### 4.4 Term 3 questionnaire: Factors affecting students' attitudes

##### 4.4.1 Regions

As explained in the beginning of the analysis of Questionnaire Term 1, four categories of regions were created based on students' nationalities. These same categories continue to be used in the analysis of Questionnaire Term 3. Table 4-15, Table 4-16, Table 4-17, and Table 4-18 below provide an overview of how students from different regions scored in each construct.

Figure 4-03 below provides a concise view of the comparison of regional group statistics.

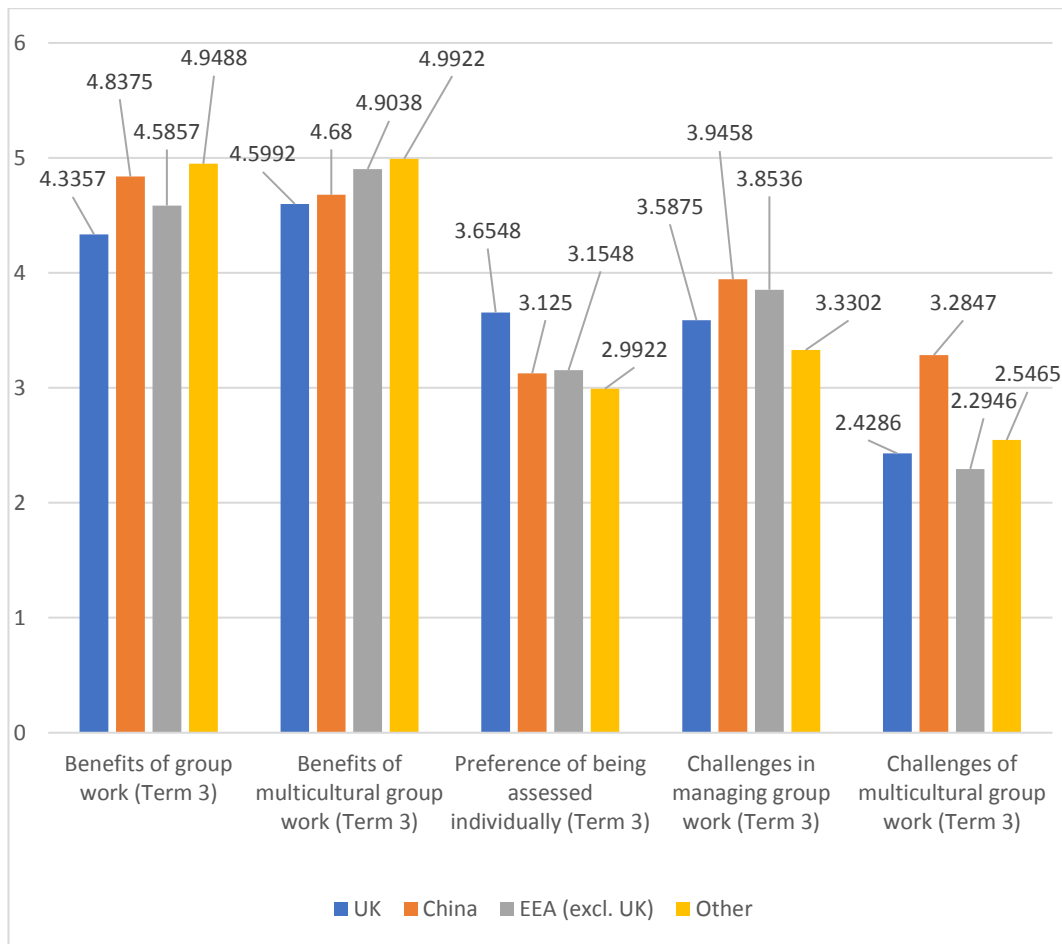


Figure 4-03 Comparison of regional group statistics for Term 3 responses

Table 4-15 Region statistics for UK in Term 3 responses

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Min	Max	Percentiles		
	Valid	Missing						25	50	75
Benefits of group work (Term 3)	28	0	4.3357	0.92705	0.859	2.00	5.80	3.8000	4.2000	5.1500
Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)	28	0	4.5992	0.70619	0.499	3.44	6.00	3.9167	4.6667	5.0833
Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)	28	0	3.6548	1.07815	1.162	1.67	6.00	3.0000	3.6667	4.3333
Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)	28	0	3.5875	0.86492	0.748	1.80	4.80	3.0000	3.7000	4.3500
Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3)	28	0	2.4286	0.87891	0.772	1.00	4.75	2.0000	2.2500	2.9375

Table 4-16 Region statistics for China in Term 3 responses

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Min	Max	Percentiles		
	Valid	Missing						25	50	75
Benefits of group work (Term 3)	24	0	4.8375	0.58445	0.342	3.80	6.00	4.4500	5.0000	5.2000
Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)	24	0	4.6800	0.58694	0.344	3.44	5.78	4.2500	4.6111	5.1111
Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)	24	0	3.1250	1.16641	1.361	1.33	6.00	2.0833	3.0000	3.6667
Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)	24	0	3.9458	1.00736	1.015	2.00	5.80	3.2500	3.9000	4.8000
Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3)	24	0	3.2847	0.88735	0.787	1.50	5.00	2.7500	3.1250	3.8750

Table 4-17 Region statistics for EEA (excl.UK) in Term 3 responses

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Min	Max	Percentiles		
	Valid	Missing						25	50	75
Benefits of group work (Term 3)	28	0	4.5857	1.19496	1.428	2.00	6.00	4.0000	5.0000	5.5500
Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)	28	0	4.9038	0.85642	0.733	2.67	6.00	4.7569	5.0000	5.3889
Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)	28	0	3.1548	1.22468	1.500	1.00	6.00	2.3333	3.0000	4.0000
Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)	28	0	3.8536	0.86869	0.755	1.80	5.40	3.6000	4.0000	4.4000
Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3)	28	0	2.2946	0.90537	0.820	1.00	4.25	1.5000	2.2500	2.9375

Table 4-18 Region statistics for Other in Term 3 responses

	N		Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Min	Max	Percentiles		
	Valid	Missing						25	50	75
Benefits of group work (Term 3)	43	0	4.9488	0.88812	0.789	2.00	6.00	4.4000	5.2000	5.8000
Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)	43	0	4.9922	0.85772	0.736	2.00	6.00	4.4444	5.1111	5.6667
Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)	43	0	2.9922	1.26927	1.611	1.00	6.00	2.0000	3.0000	4.0000
Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)	43	0	3.3302	1.03177	1.065	1.00	6.00	2.6000	3.2000	3.8000
Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3)	43	0	2.5465	1.13160	1.281	1.00	6.00	1.5000	2.5000	3.2500

To further scrutinise students' answers based on their regional background, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the four groups (See Table 4-19).

Table 4-19 Comparison of Term 3 responses by region

ANOVA						
		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Benefits of group work (Term 3)	Between Groups	7.195	3	2.398	2.778	0.044
	Within Groups	102.742	119	0.863		
	Total	109.937	122			
Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3)	Between Groups	3.307	3	1.102	1.820	0.147
	Within Groups	72.090	119	0.606		
	Total	75.398	122			
Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3)	Between Groups	7.834	3	2.611	1.819	0.147
	Within Groups	170.837	119	1.436		
	Total	178.671	122			
Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)	Between Groups	7.708	3	2.569	2.815	0.042
	Within Groups	108.623	119	0.913		
	Total	116.331	122			
Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3)	Between Groups	14.804	3	4.935	5.112	0.002
	Within Groups	114.881	119	0.965		
	Total	129.685	122			

The statistics shown in Table 4-19 above reveal three significant difference in the regional groups: *Benefits of group work (Term 3)* (sig. =0.044), *Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)* (sig. =0.019) and *Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3)* (sig. =0.002). Independent sample t-tests were therefore carried out to further examine the different scores based on which region the respondents were from. In the same way as I did with the Questionnaire Term 1 data, I performed a pairwise comparison to shed more light on these significant findings in order to identify which groups differed in which way for the data from Questionnaire Term 3. As a result of this procedure, the following differences were identified (See Table 4-20, Table 4-21 and Table 4-22).

Table 4-20 Differences in Term 3 scores for Benefits of group work

<i>Benefits of group work (Term 3)</i>	t	df	p
<b>UK</b> (M=4.34, SD=0.93) vs <b>China</b> (M=4.84, SD=0.58)	-2.289	50	0.026
<b>UK</b> (M=4.34, SD=0.93) vs <b>Other</b> (M=4.95, SD=0.89)	-2.794	69	0.007

In the data shown in Table 4-20 above, there is a significant difference between the scores for UK (M=4.34, SD=0.93) and China (M=4.84, SD=0.58);  $t(50) = -2.289$ ,  $p = 0.026$ . Another significant difference was found between the scores of UK (M=4.34, SD=0.93) and Other (M=4.95, SD=0.89);  $t(69) = -2.2794$ ,  $p = 0.007$ . It indicates that even though all students agreed with the benefits of GW, students from China and students from Other countries (see methodology for more details on the countries), in other words, non-EEA country students, had more positive opinions about how GW was beneficial to them compared to students from the UK, who are the home students in this study.

Table 4-21 Differences in Term 3 scores for Challenges in managing group work

<i>Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)</i>	t	df	p
<b>China</b> (M=3.95, SD=1.00) vs <b>Other</b> (M=3.33, SD=1.03)	2.361	65	0.021
<b>EEA (excl. UK)</b> (M=3.85, SD=0.87) vs <b>Other</b> (M=3.33, SD=1.03)	2.219	69	0.030

Table 4-21 above displays the difference found among regional groups for their scores on challenges they faced during working in groups with other students. A statistically significant difference was found between the scores for China (M=3.95, SD=1.00) and Other (M=3.33, SD=1.03);  $t(65) = 2.361$ ,  $p = 0.021$ . Another one was found between EEA (excl. UK) (M=3.85, SD=0.87) and Other (M=3.33, SD=1.03);  $t(69) = 2.19$ ,  $p = 0.030$ . In these two comparisons, students from the regional group Other scored less than 3.5 (on a 6-point Likert scale) and students from EEA countries (excluding UK) and China scored more than 3.5. Additionally, even though statistically speaking there was no significant difference in how students in the regional group UK scored compared to the other regional groups, they also scored above 3.5: UK (M=3.59, SD=0.86). Two indications could be

drawn from the differences of these scores. Firstly, students from EEA countries (including UK) and China perceived that managing GW was much more challenging for them compared to the students in the Other group, because they scored higher. Secondly, only students from the regional group Other had a mean less than 3.5, so this is the only group who did not agree with the difficulties listed in the construct Challenges in managing group work in Term 3. In other words, these students found it less challenging to work in groups than students from EEA countries and China.

Table 4-22 Differences in Term 3 scores for Challenges of multicultural group work

<i>Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3)</i>	t	df	p
<b>UK</b> (M=2.43, SD=0.88) vs <b>China</b> (M=3.28, SD=0.89)	-3.486	50	0.001
<b>China</b> (M=3.28, SD=0.89) vs <b>EEA (excl. UK)</b> (M=2.29, SD=0.91)	3.967	50	0.000
<b>China</b> (M=3.28, SD=0.89) vs <b>Other</b> (M=2.55, SD=1.13)	2.755	65	0.008

As shown in Table 4-22 above, three statistically significant differences were found among different regional groups for the construct Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3). The first difference is between the scores for UK (M=2.43, SD=0.88) and China (M=3.28, SD=0.89);  $t(50) = -3.486$ ,  $p = 0.001$ . The second difference was found between China (M=3.28, SD=0.89) and EEA (excl. UK) (M=2.29, SD=0.91);  $t(50) = 3.967$ ,  $p = 0.000$ . The third one is between China (M=3.28, SD=0.89) and Other (M=2.55, SD=1.13);  $t(65) = 2.755$ ,  $p = 0.008$ . All the differences mentioned above were between students from China and students from other regions. Even though all the students scored less than 3.5, students from China scored significantly higher in this construct than students from other regional groups. This means that while participants in general did not perceive multicultural group work as negative or difficult, Chinese students found MGW more challenging than students from other regions in Term 3 in this study. This finding is the same as in Term 1, so there did not appear to be a change in their attitudes to or perceptions of multicultural group work during the course of their study.

#### 4.4.2 Native English speakers and non-native English speakers

In the analysis of Questionnaire Term 3, the criterion of English native speaker was the same as in the first questionnaire. The students who identified English as (one of) their first language(s) are in the group Native English speakers (L1) and those who did not are in the group Non-native English speakers (L2). Table 4-23 below shows the numbers of participants in each group.

Table 4-23 Percentage of L1 and L2 responses in Term 3

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Native English speakers (L1)	44	34.9
Non-native English speakers (L2)	81	64.3
Missing	1	0.8
Total	126	100.0

Figure 4-04 below shows the group comparison of Term 3 scores for native English speakers and non-native English speakers in different constructs.

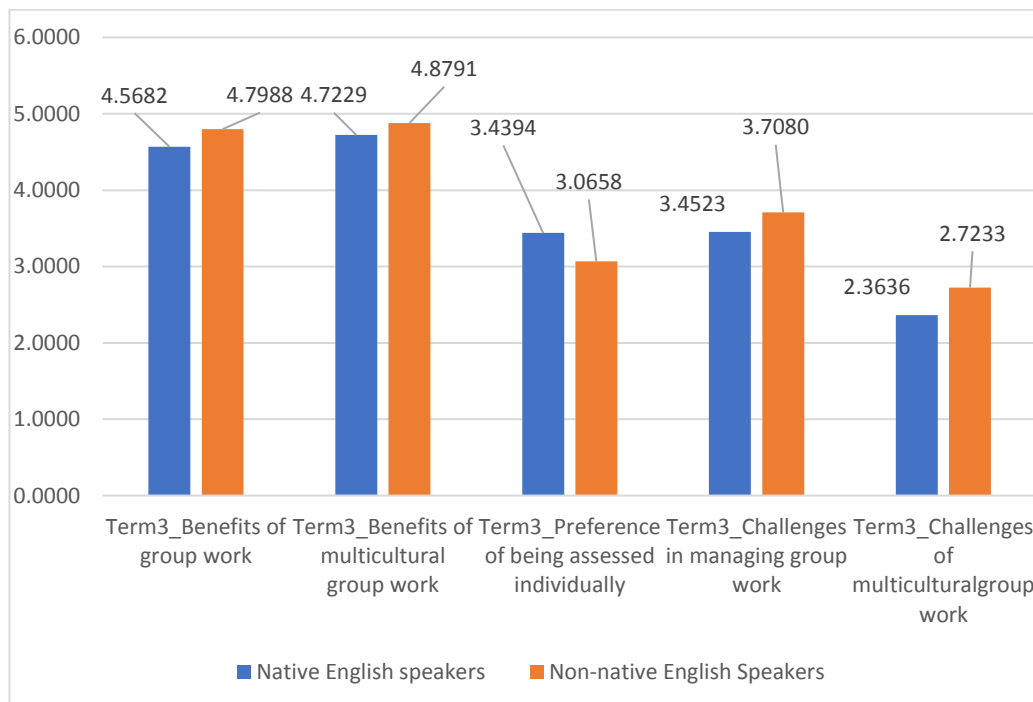


Figure 4-04 Comparison of L1 and L2 attitude scores in different constructs in Term 3 responses



To further compare students' answers based on the difference in first language, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the two groups of native and non-native English speakers. In the results, there was no statistically significant difference between the L1 group and the L2 group in their scores for each construct. However, as shown in Figure 4-04 above, L1 group ( $M=3.45$ ,  $SD=0.94$ ) scored less than 3.5 and the L2 group ( $M=3.70$ ,  $SD=1.00$ ) scored more than 3.5. It indicates that native speakers found it less difficult to manage the challenges in working in groups. Additionally, non-native speakers also perceived more challenges when working in groups than other students in general.

#### 4.5 Comparison over time: Differences in attitudes towards MGW in Term 3 and Term 1

In this section, Questionnaire Term 1 and Questionnaire Term 3 data are linked together in order to analyse the data from a longitudinal perspective. In total, 126 respondents answered both questionnaires, and their responses are compared in this part of analysis.

A paired samples t-test was conducted in order to find out if students changed their attitude towards working in groups during their one-year master's degrees. It was also used to find out if they had a different perception of multicultural group work at the beginning and the end of their study. Table 4-24 is the result of this step of the analysis. It can be seen that there was no significant difference in the comparison of Questionnaire Term 3 and Questionnaire Term 1 data. It could be interpreted that in general students did not change their attitudes to or perceptions of multicultural group work.

In order to further explore these two sources of data, the categories used in previous sections, namely different regional groups and whether they are native English speakers or not, are employed again to find out if students in the subgroups showed any change over time.

Table 4-24 Differences in students' attitudes towards MGW in Term 3 and Term 1

		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Term 3 Mean-Term 1 Mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
						Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Benefits of group work (Term 3) - Benefits of group work (Term 1)	4.7230-4.7388	-0.11587	0.78184	0.06965	-0.25372	0.02198	-1.664	125	0.099
Pair 2	Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3) - Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 1)	4.8211-4.7591	-0.03362	0.61856	0.05511	-0.14268	0.07544	-0.610	125	0.543
Pair 3	Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3) - Preference of being assessed individually (Term 1)	3.1931-3.1766	-0.01190	1.19484	0.10644	-0.22257	0.19876	-0.112	125	0.911
Pair 4	Challenges in managing group work (Term 3) - Challenges in managing group work (Term 1)	3.6337-3.6295	-0.11746	0.87082	0.07758	-0.27100	0.03608	-1.514	125	0.133
Pair 5	Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3) Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 1)	2.5840-2.7477	-0.090608	0.865642	0.077117	-0.243234	0.062017	-1.175	125	0.242

#### 4.5.1 Regions

The following four tables are produced from the results of comparing Term 3 and Term 1 data based on the regional group differences (See Table 4-25, Table 4-26, Table 4-27 and Table 4-28).

There was only one significant difference found (see Table 4-28) in all comparisons of regional groups over time, which was the difference in scores from students in group Other for *Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)* ( $M=3.33$ ,  $SD=1.03$ ) and *Challenges in managing group work (Term 1)* ( $M=3.69$ ,  $SD=1.12$ );  $t(42) = -3.029$ ,  $p = 0.004$ . This finding means that students from the regional group Other changed their perceptions of challenges they faced when they work in groups on their academic courses. In Term 1, they scored above 3.5 ( $M=3.69$ ), meaning they agreed with a lot of difficulties that happened when they work in groups with other students. However, in Term 3, their score dropped below 3.5 ( $M=3.33$ ). This changed could be interpreted to mean that this group of students no longer see the challenges happening during GW as so difficult as before.

Only one significant difference was found, so it can be concluded that there was only minor change found in the comparison of Questionnaire Term 3 and Questionnaire Term 1 data, even in the regional subgroups. One can still argue that in general students did not change their attitude to or perceptions of multicultural group work.

Table 4-25 Comparison of Term 3 with Term 1 responses by region: UK

		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Term 3 Mean-Term 1 Mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
						Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Benefits of group work (Term 3) - Benefits of group work (Term 1)	4.3357-4.7036	-0.33571	0.88953	0.16811	-0.68064	0.00921	-1.997	27	0.056
Pair 2	Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3) - Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 1)	4.5992-4.8011	-0.21032	0.61108	0.11548	-0.44727	0.02664	-1.821	27	0.080
Pair 3	Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3) - Preference of being assessed individually (Term 1)	3.6548-3.4435	0.21429	1.20515	0.22775	-0.25302	0.68159	0.941	27	0.355
Pair 4	Challenges in managing group work (Term 3) - Challenges in managing group work (Term 1)	3.5875-3.7375	-0.19821	0.62070	0.11730	-0.43890	0.04247	-1.690	27	0.103
Pair 5	Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3) - Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 1)	2.4286-2.3750	0.142857	0.661188	0.124953	-0.113525	0.399239	1.143	27	0.263

Table 4-26 Comparison of Term 3 with Term 1 responses by region: China

		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Term 3 Mean-Term 1 Mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
						Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Benefits of group work (Term 3) - Benefits of group work (Term 1)	4.8375-4.7034	0.02917	0.84621	0.17273	-0.32816	0.38649	0.169	23	0.867
Pair 2	Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3) - Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 1)	4.6800-4.6710	-0.15336	0.65588	0.13388	-0.43031	0.12360	-1.145	23	0.264
Pair 3	Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3) Preference of being assessed individually (Term 1)	3.1250-2.9064	0.50000	1.22376	0.24980	-0.01675	1.01675	2.002	23	0.057
Pair 4	Challenges in managing group work (Term 3) - Challenges in managing group work (Term 1)	3.9458-3.3877	0.23750	1.01159	0.20649	-0.18966	0.66466	1.150	23	0.262
Pair 5	Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3) - Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 1)	3.2847-3.1852	0.034722	0.917462	0.187276	-0.352688	0.422133	0.185	23	0.855

Table 4-27 Comparison of Term 3 with Term 1 responses by region: EEA (excl.UK)

		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Term 3 Mean-Term 1 Mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
						Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Benefits of group work (Term 3) - Benefits of group work (Term 1)	4.5857-4.7217	-0.17143	0.75172	0.14206	-0.46291	0.12006	-1.207	27	0.238
Pair 2	Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3) - Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 1)	4.9038-4.8219	0.08929	0.64294	0.12150	-0.16002	0.33859	0.735	27	0.469
Pair 3	Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3) Preference of being assessed individually (Term 1)	3.1548-3.0217	-0.21429	1.17576	0.22220	-0.67020	0.24163	-0.964	27	0.343
Pair 4	Challenges in managing group work (Term 3) - Challenges in managing group work (Term 1)	3.8536-3.7348	0.06786	1.02209	0.19316	-0.32847	0.46418	0.351	27	0.728
Pair 5	Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3) - Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 1)	2.2946-2.4728	-0.214286	0.789732	0.149245	-0.520512	0.091941	-1.436	27	0.163

Table 4-28 Comparison of Term 3 with Term 1 responses by region: Other

		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Term 3 Mean-Term 1 Mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
						Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Benefits of group work (Term 3) - Benefits of group work (Term 1)	4.9488-4.7922	-0.08605	0.61279	0.09345	-0.27464	0.10254	-0.921	42	0.362
Pair 2	Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3) - Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 1)	4.9922-4.7696	0.05426	0.58863	0.08977	-0.12689	0.23542	0.605	42	0.549
Pair 3	Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3) Preference of being assessed individually (Term 1)	2.9922-3.2890	-0.26744	1.12284	0.17123	-0.61300	0.07812	-1.562	42	0.126
Pair 4	Challenges in managing group work (Term 3) - Challenges in managing group work (Term 1)	3.3302-3.6775	-0.35930	0.77784	0.11862	-0.59869	-0.11992	-3.029	42	0.004
Pair 5	Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3) Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 1)	2.5465-2.7982	-0.238372	1.004385	0.153167	-0.547476	0.070732	-1.556	42	0.127

#### 4.5.2 Native English speakers and non-native English speakers

Table 4-29 and Table 4-30 are produced from the result of comparing Term 3 and Term 1 data on the basis of first languages differences. Students' self-identified first languages will continue to be used to assign participants to the groups of Native English Speakers and Non-native English Speakers.

There was also only one significant difference found (see Table 4-29) in this section of comparisons, it is the difference of students of group Native English Speakers, their scores in *Challenges in managing group work (Term 3)* ( $M=3.45$ ,  $SD=0.94$ ) and *Challenges in managing group work (Term 1)* ( $M=3.70$ ,  $SD=1.01$ );  $t(43) = -2.385$ ,  $p = 0.022$ . This finding means that native English speakers also changed their perceptions of challenges they face when they work in groups on their academic courses. In Term 1, they score above 3.5 ( $M=3.70$ ), meaning they agreed with a lot of difficulties that happened when they worked in groups with other students. Later in Term 3, their score dropped below 3.5 ( $M=3.45$ ). This small change in the digits could be interpreted to mean that they changed their attitudes towards working in groups with other students, from finding it difficult to finding it not as difficult as before.

This change could be seen as meaning that native English speakers' attitudes towards working in group improved over time, and it could be that the more group work they are involved in, the more experienced they became in managing the challenges in group work, hence they found it less difficult over time.



Table 4-29 Comparison of Term 3 with Term 1 responses: Native English Speakers

		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig.  (2-tailed )
		Term 3 Mean-Term 1 Mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
						Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Benefits of group work (Term 3) - Benefits of group work (Term 1)	4.5682-4.7270	-0.20000	0.88080	0.13279	-0.46779	0.06779	-1.506	43	0.139
Pair 2	Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3) - Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 1)	4.7229-4.8638	-0.10859	0.64973	0.09795	-0.30612	0.08895	-1.109	43	0.274
Pair 3	Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3) - Preference of being assessed individually (Term 1)	3.4394-3.4048	-0.03788	1.23518	0.18621	-0.41341	0.33765	-0.203	43	0.840
Pair 4	Challenges in managing group work (Term 3) - Challenges in managing group work (Term 1)	3.4523-3.7825	-0.25227	0.70174	0.10579	-0.46562	-0.03892	-2.385	43	0.022
Pair 5	Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3) - Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 1)	2.3636-2.3929	-0.062500	0.790799	0.119217	-0.302925	0.177925	-0.524	43	0.603

Table 4-30 Comparison of Term 3 with Term 1 responses: Non-native English Speakers

		Paired Differences						t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Term 3 Mean - Term 1 Mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
						Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Benefits of group work (Term 3) - Benefits of group work (Term 1)	4.7988-4.7443	-0.09877	0.68328	0.07592	-0.24985	0.05232	-1.301	80	0.197
Pair 2	Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 3) - Benefits of multicultural group work (Term 1)	4.8791-4.7291	0.00257	0.60401	0.06711	-0.13099	0.13613	0.038	80	0.970
Pair 3	Preference of being assessed individually (Term 3) Preference of being assessed individually (Term 1)	3.0658-3.1131	0.00206	1.18746	0.13194	-0.26051	0.26463	0.016	80	0.988
Pair 4	Challenges in managing group work (Term 3) - Challenges in managing group work (Term 1)	3.7080-3.5790	-0.04074	0.95040	0.10560	-0.25089	0.16941	-0.386	80	0.701
Pair 5	Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 3) - Challenges of multicultural group work (Term 1)	2.7233-2.8652	-0.106996	0.913178	0.101464	-0.308916	0.094924	-1.055	80	0.295

## 4.6 Conclusion of the chapter

In this chapter, the quantitative data from two questionnaires was analysed. All participants showed appreciation of the value of working in groups as well as the value of multicultural group work. Meanwhile, the challenges and difficulties of MGW were also reported by them, drawing on their experience of MGW during their course of study. The longitudinal comparison showed that the native English speakers had a minor improvement in attitudes towards group work, because they perceived the challenges as less difficult at the end of their study. The 43 non-Chinese participants who were not from EEA (including UK) countries also showed this same minor improvement. In conclusion, based on the quantitative data, the majority of the master's degree students who participated in this study did not have a change of mind towards multicultural group work compared with before they started the degree. This not all in line with what commonly is considered under benefits of group work and not all students necessarily change their attitudes.

Admittedly this study only covers a short period of time, however, this is not up to the standard of what postgraduate students in the UK are expected to achieve within a one-year master's degree (QAA, 2015). However, quantitative data could only provide limited information about how students think MGW could benefit them and why they found it challenging. And there were no details about why some of them showed some improvement in their attitudes or why the majority of the participants also had no change. This does not add more to our existing knowledge of students' MGW in Higher Education. These unknown factors make it a necessity to look deeper into what students think of MGW and how they perceive the reality of study in a multicultural environment. Therefore, in the next chapter, an analysis of qualitative data will be conducted so that these unanswered questions can be further explored

## 5 Qualitative Analysis and Discussion

In the previous section, the findings of the quantitative data analysis showed that students' attitudes towards MGW did not see a significant change during their one-year master's course. However, the quantitative analysis did not provide any opportunity to reveal insights about students' specific views and accounts of the process of working in groups. This was rather the purpose of the qualitative analysis presented in this chapter. What students actually say about the content, the interaction and other group members over the time period of the study offers much more insight into understanding this part of their learning experience. In this section, qualitative data drawn from the answers from open-ended questions from two questionnaires and two sets of interviews with participants at different points in time will be presented and discussed in order to provide a more detailed picture of their experience of MGW.

In the examples used to illustrate the analytical commentary in this chapter, the contributors are identified by code I or Q (designating Interview or Questionnaire), participant number, and pseudonym in the case of interviewees.

### 5.1 Perceived benefits of multicultural group work: Academic objectives

As discussed in the literature review, previous research on GW has shown that it is beneficial for students' learning experience in many different ways. In this section, I will present examples of the academic aspects of working in groups that are perceived by participants as beneficial, grouped into the following themes emerging from the analysis of the data: different perspectives on the work, creativity, efficiency, giving and receiving feedback, and positive impact on academic development.

#### 5.1.1 Exposure to different perspectives on the work

In group discussion, students are exposed to the viewpoints and behaviour of other group members (Mello, 1993). Getting different perspectives from peers was

perceived as one of the most important benefits of working in groups (Thorley & Gregory, 1994), for example as explained by the following participants:

Example 1.1a

I05 [Jaime]: "...I think I'm a people person so I just like to get other perspectives, and like I studied psychology before, obviously I want to know what people are thinking... I always like having alternative understandings and opinions, because there's not ever one way to look at something."

Example 1.1b

Q3095: "I think it provides an alternative viewpoint which can only enhance the experience."

Example 1.1c

Q3003: "It really forces me to think from other perspectives and now I feel more comfortable than I did before."

All three participants showed appreciation at being exposed to different perspectives in their MGW experience. Jaime in Example 1.1a constructs herself as someone who "always likes having alternative opinions", regardless what or whose those opinions are because she believes in looking at something from multiple angles. The participant in Example 1.1b describes alternative viewpoints as "enhanc[ing] the experience". In Example 1.1c, another student describes feeling more comfortable (with MGW) as a result of being "forced" to think from other perspectives.

For a number of students this exposure to different viewpoints and perspectives was a crucial positive aspect of MGW, and they reported positive learning experiences regarding adjusting their own perspectives through the group work.

Furthermore, when the group members are from different cultures, it brings more different opinions and approaches into the discussion (cf. DiStefano & Maznevski, 2000), which is also perceived as very beneficial by participants

Example 1.1d

Q3048: "...I find it adds value due to the different perspectives and interpretation because of your cultures. It gives you the opportunity to learn more about other cultures and be a better practitioner because you can be more inclusive..."

#### Example 1.1e

Q3010: "...I appreciate the level to which a diverse group challenges and enhances my presentation and engagement as well as appreciate the different views as stimulated by different cultures."

#### Example 1.1f

Q3108: "I have worked with many more students who come from a different cultural background to me. This has been very interesting academically and also very enjoyable socially."

In Example 1.1d, the participant comments that diversity "adds value" to working in groups because it helps to be "a better practitioner": by interacting with students from other cultures, one could learn to be more "inclusive" as the understanding of other cultures increase. In Example 1.1e, the participant highlights being more challenged and more engaged as a benefit, and more importantly, the stimulation of thinking could only be triggered by different cultural perspectives. The participant in Example 1f mentions how MGW is "interesting academically" and "enjoyable socially". The data suggest that working in culturally mixed groups provides a platform where students are exposed to culturally different perspectives. This diversity stimulates thought as it challenges ideas rooted in their own cultures. The experience was seen as potentially interesting and enjoyable when the students were learning to be more inclusive of other cultures. These findings are consistent with previous research on the advantages of multicultural groups (cf. DiStefano & Maznevski, 2000; Leask, 2005; Osmond & Roed, 2009; Edmead, 2012).

### **5.1.2 Encouraging deeper learning**

In the literature, GW is reported to be used for encouraging deeper learning (Thorley & Gregory, 1994) and it has been shown that students themselves consider that working in groups fosters the development of a greater breadth of knowledge through discussion (Hassanien, 2006). However, the literature does not specify that this benefit of encouraging deeper learning would be applicable to multicultural groups. Deeper learning would require students to spend enough time to exchange critical thoughts on a topic, to debate and re-evaluate each other's ideas, as well as stimulate thought. There might be a concern that too many different points of views might affect the vertical development of a discussion, and too much difference in viewpoints or approaches would require extensive time and energy to be committed. The culturally different opinions could be perceived as an obstacle to

in-depth group discussion regarding the depth of discussion, for example, students might be over focused on the censorship of Chinese media when the actual discussion topic is marketing strategies for a new brand entering Chinese market. In order to answer my research question of what factors are perceived as promoting a more positive mixed-culture group learning experience it was important to find out whether MGW also encourages deeper learning in the way GW does. Therefore, the participants were asked questions regarding this specific perspective, and they reported a similar experience when working in multicultural groups.

#### Example 1.2a

Q117: “Working in a mixed-culture group helps you to understand the different cultures and their view about things, which is interesting to know. This experience sometimes helps in broadening your understanding, way of thinking and outlook about different things”.

#### Example 1.2b

Q3109: “... I enjoy meeting new people and learning about their cultures. it is stimulating to hear different view points - It encourages wider thinking”

In Example 1.2a, the student mentions “broadening...understanding, way of thinking and outlook”, and in Example 1.2b another student mentions “wider thinking”. Their comments indicate that culturally different perspectives are not perceived as an obstacle to the depth of discussion and this finding suggests that MGW appears, therefore, to carry the same benefit of encouraging deeper learning as GW.

### **5.1.3 Gathering different knowledge and expertise**

One of the intellectual benefits of GW in HE is that students can learn in teams to gather and manage knowledge and expertise (Levin, 2004). Again, it is not specified in the literature whether students working in multicultural groups manage to gather different knowledge and expertise from group members, such as those from different disciplines or with different professional expertise. There is a possibility that students may be so engaged with cultural differences that they become less focused on the subject. The participants in this study reported, however, that they managed to gather discipline and professional expertise from their group members when they work in multicultural groups:

### Example 1.3a

Q1071: “I don’t see mixed culture groups as a hindrance, rather as a benefit. For example, a group member of mine this term was a German native and we chose to do our final project on a pertinent period of German history. In many ways this was beneficial to our academic study and saved us time translating resources and expanded our knowledge of unknown cultural histories”.

### Example 1.3b

I03 [Leo]: “...the group task was maybe something new for me so I don’t have any experience, or any knowledge, and if someone in our group has some experience, it will be much better”.

### Example 1.3c

I07 [Dhisha]: “...because I get, as I mentioned earlier, different points of view... And it’s also good because I meet people from different backgrounds, for example from finance background, and they know more about finance than I do, that’s perfectly natural, so that really helps me because sometimes we help each other with some things that we don’t understand...”

Students from different backgrounds could bring their specialised knowledge, such as “unknown cultural histories” (Example 1.3a) into group projects and postgraduate students with work experience could contribute industry knowledge into group work discussion, which helps students with less work experience to understand their group task better, as Leo pointed out (Example 1.3b).

Even when all students in one group all have work experience, each individual still brings specific knowledge relating to their own professional backgrounds to group discussion, helping other group members to broaden their understanding of the subjects of study. Dhisha mentioned that it would be “perfectly natural” for some people to know more about finance than her (Example 1.3c). This is so especially in courses like the MBA programme, which has a strong emphasis on professional development and working in mixed national groups (Robinson, 2006).

### Example 1.3d

Q3030: “I do value mixed-culture group work a lot more now. It may be difficult to work alone for my elective modules since I have come to rely heavily on the diversity and expertise that mixed-culture group members bring to the table”.

The student quoted in Example 1.3d even came “to rely heavily on the diversity and expertise” of group members in MGW.



#### Example 1.3e

I02 [Anneli]: “Yes, I think it provides you with a good benchmark, also of what you know in terms of the general knowledge of students, and you’re obviously challenged on your opinions, it’s valuable.”

Researcher: “So it helps the understanding of the subject as well?”

I02 [Anneli]: “Yes, of course. In addition to studying on your own, it’s something that you verbally hear but stick much better to your memory in that way.”

Participants in the above two examples reported that they managed to gather culturally different ideas as well as knowledge and expertise when working in multicultural groups. They also pointed out that discussion and interaction in MGW not only provides a chance to see an overview of their peers’ understanding of the subjects, but as Anneli explained, the experience of being challenged by others also added value to the learning experience (Example 1.3e). This was because more challenging discussion not only brought different opinions but also helped to make the knowledge more memorable.

Other participants also suggested that through learning about different ideas from group members, they have come see their own limitations, hence they gained a more positive attitudes towards why MGW is important for their study. Siri (Example 1.3f) said it “makes you realise ‘okay, I don’t know everything’”:

#### Example 1.3f

I04 [Siri]: “I think I just realised your own limitations when it comes to what things to consider. You can’t think of everything and that’s why we have group work. Because we’re supposed to have different ideas for one assignment, which shows and makes you realise ‘Okay, I don’t know everything’ [laughing], and I can’t see everything ...”

The findings in this section show that working in multicultural groups has brought different perspectives to participants’ discussion experiences at two levels: first, different opinions and thoughts from different group members simply because people think differently; and second, different perspectives from peers from different countries and different previous professional and educational backgrounds.

### **5.1.4 Creativity**

Creativity is one of the advantages of multicultural teams in the workplace identified by DiStefano and Maznevski (2000), which was also why MGW is being increasingly used in HE to help students to enhance and develop their future

employability. Creativity is also cited as being one of the benefits of multicultural group work (Knight 2004; Leask, 2005; Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2016), and this benefit seems to be well recognised by the students in my study.

#### Example 1.4a

Q1070: “After all, mixed-culture group work can produce a perfect combination of creative ideas and innovations. It is quite rewarding.”

#### Example 1.4b

Q1039: “... I was used to working on complex projects with people from different nations before my MBA course. The experience gained from working with students from other nations during my MBA has had no new impact on my attitude to diverse groups. However, it has added more weight to my conviction that diverse work groups are good for creativity & innovation and drives greater productivity than mono-cultural groups.”

The student quoted in Example 1.4a described the potential of MGW to produce “a perfect combination of creative ideas and innovations”. Creativity and innovation was also mentioned in relation to increased productivity in diverse groups (Example 1.4b).

During her interview Heidi highlighted the importance of creativity in working in multicultural groups.

#### Example 1.4c

I01[Heidi]: “... I think [MGW is] not at all efficient, it’s not efficient but it’s more productive, more creative and it will possibly lead to a better outcome if you work in a group, but it’s not more efficient, I think it can work.”

In Example 1.4c, Heidi emphasises that MGW is “not efficient”, even though creativity makes it “more productive”. In other words, the advantage of being “more creative” outweighs the disadvantage of being more time consuming.

Researcher: “Do you think this group work thing is worth the investment of your time and energy in general?”

I01 [Heidi]: “Yes, I think so, definitely because of the way in which it helps be more creative and it helps me to learn from other people because if I work with people who are, you know, very intelligent and work hard, then I can learn from them and we can create better ideas because there’s two of us or three of us...”

She agreed that it was therefore worth the extra time, especially because of learning from group members who were “very intelligent and work hard”.

#### Example 1.4d

Q1145: “I always agree on the benefits brought by the mixed culture; although there are conflicts, different working ways and habits, they are outweighed by advantages which are wider ideas and more creativity.”

In Example 1.4d, the student emphasises that the drawbacks caused by differences were balanced out and also outweighed by advantages including “more creativity”.

In this section, participants reported their appreciation of creativity when they were working in multicultural groups, and how diversity helps to increase this creativity during MGW. It was also interesting to see that there were some disadvantages of MGW, such as “not efficient” and “conflicts”, mentioned by the participants when talking about the benefit of creativity. They concluded for themselves that the benefits of creativity outweighed the other disadvantages such as lack of efficiency. How students balanced these two sides of MGW will be further explored in section 5.3. The finding here suggests that students considered this specific benefit of MGW to come at a cost.

### **5.1.5 Giving and receiving feedback**

Peer feedback helps students in the clarification of their ideas and evaluation of others’ ideas (Hassanien, 2006), and it can be given and received in ways that are more effective than when it comes from a tutor (Thorley & Gregory, 1994). Participants pointed out that working in groups provided a chance to get feedback on their own understanding of the academic subject:

#### Example 1.5a

I07 [Dhisha]: “Yes, I think it does because you get different points of view and sometimes you find that your idea is completely wrong!”

#### Example 1.5b

Q1110: “... I start to see that other people’s point of view can improve my work.”

#### Example 1.5c

I02 [Anneli]: “Yes, I think if you compare assessment by professor and then versus the feedback that you get from your group members, I think it’s much richer, the ones you get from the group members...”

They acknowledged that this could show them where their own ideas or work was wrong (Example 1.5a) and could be improved (Example 1.5b). In fact, peer feedback was also considered by Anneli to be “much richer” (Example 1.5c) than

the feedback given in assessments by lecturers. Apart from receiving immediate feedback, students also have opportunities to practise giving feedback to their fellow students. Giving feedback to peers in discussion is not a simple or straightforward thing because of all the different personalities, communication and working styles:

#### Example 1.5d

I02 [Anneli]: "... you have to have a certain filter when it's coming from group members because there might be more biased feedback perhaps, depending on what sort of people you are dealing with but you need to change the feedback to yourself and then re-evaluate which of that you want to take to yourself and grow from, and what perhaps is coming because of a bad day."

In Example 1.5d, Anneli describes peer feedback as potentially "more biased" due to these individual differences. However, she emphasises that sharing and comparing individual students' ideas could also help her to differentiate and re-evaluate the feedback she received, and to understand that negative feedback might possibly be a result of the feedback giver's personal issues rather than an objective evaluation of the work.

The participants in this student recognised receiving immediate peer feedback as very beneficial to their studies. More importantly, they reported that they had learnt how to give feedback to peers by receiving different feedback from different group members. This suggests that MGW indeed fulfilled one of its educational purposes in providing a multicultural learning environment and encouraging a student-centred learning experience.

#### **5.1.6 Positive impact on academic development**

In previous research, students showed a preference for working in groups with co-national or similar culture students. This is because working with students from different cultures was considered to be much more work than was necessary to complete a group project. The participants in this study were therefore asked if working in multicultural groups would interfere with their academic development, especially compared to working in monocultural groups (cf. Volet & Ang, 2012; Osmond & Roed, 2009). Most of the participants did not consider the diversity of a group to be an interference.

For example, Anneli commented that working in multicultural groups never interfered negatively with her study.

#### Example 1.6e

I02 [Anneli]: "...I think quite the contrary, I think it's really important to work with a mixed culture group and perhaps, I'm also thinking here beyond just academic development but like life education, I find it so important. So I don't see any reason why it would interfere and actually, the fact that you're from very different groups, people have different academic input as well which can be valuable".

Anneli pointed out that MGW is important for "life education" as well as "academic development". She highlighted the value of "different academic input" arising from people's "very different" group origins (Example 1.6e), because it enhances the academic learning process.

Dhisha agreed that MGW does not interfere with this process (Example 1.6f). She argued that "it depends on individuals", and downplayed the roles of nationality or home culture in making individuals either more easy or more difficult to work with in a study-related group project.

#### Example 1.6f

I07 [Dhisha]: "... I mean it doesn't interfere at all. It depends on individuals and not on where they come from or the culture. To me, that's how it's always been."

When asked whether she felt that multicultural groups would be more of an obstacle when working with her peers, Heidi compared her experience in Term 1 with her experience in Term 2.

#### Example 1.6g

I01 [Heidi]: "Well, I thought in the first term, I had this group work where we had to hand in an assignment as a group and I felt that working as a group slowed down the whole process of doing an assignment, which is why I thought yes and in the second term, not so much. I think the reason is that the group work in Term 2 went much better than Term 1...So it wouldn't interfere because it was good group work, the first term it was difficult group work so it interfered".

She described a negative experience in Term 1 (when "working as a group slowed down the whole process of doing an assignment") as "difficult group work" that interfered with the learning process, and she contrasted this with a positive experience in Term 2, described as "good group work", that didn't interfere (Example 1.6g). However, it is not clear from this extract why the group work in Term 2 "went much better".

In conclusion, a range of opinions regarding whether and how the diversity of the group was affecting participants' academic development. Their attitudes ranged from "on the contrary" (in Example 1.6e) to "it depends on the individual" (in Example 1.6f). Often, the same person expressed different attitudes towards multicultural groups at different times in an academic year and in different groups (in Example 1.6g). These findings indicate that multicultural group work can have a positive impact on students' academic development, although individual differences can affect general attitudes towards working in groups – and consequently, in specific cases MGW was perceived as hindering the working process.

### **5.1.7 Section conclusion**

Overall in section 5.1, seven perspectives on working in groups were presented as beneficial to participants' academic objectives: exposure to different perspectives on the work, depth of discussion, gathering different knowledge and expertise, creativity, giving and receiving feedback to peers, and positive impact on academic development. The findings are consistent with what has been reported in previous research on multicultural group work, and also provide evidence that MGW brings the same benefits as GW in terms of helping students achieve academic objectives.

## **5.2 Perceived benefits of multicultural group work: Interpersonal and employability skills development**

In the last section, I mainly reported on the perceived benefits of MGW focusing on academic objectives. As has been established in previous research, in addition to academic objectives, MGW also helps students develop their interpersonal skills (McNally, 1994; Mello, 1993). In analysing the qualitative data set of this research, six themes of interpersonal skills emerged from participants' reports: a) conflict resolution, b) communication and negotiation, c) patience and respect towards group members, d) intercultural skills development, and e) preparation for the future workplace. These themes are explored further in this section.

### 5.2.1 Conflict resolution

Conflict is among the most common challenges affecting students working in mixed groups according to previous research by Turner (2009). However, conflict is a very subjective notion that is subject to individual difference. There was no unified definition in the literature of the types of conflict that affected students' experience of MGW. Not all participants in this study used the word *conflict* to refer to all the possible situations that could be interpreted as conflict. In order to minimising the possible effect of over-interpreting, only examples from the few students who used the word itself are presented are presented in this section.

In Example 2.1a, the student attributes conflict in MGW to others' lack of "a proper working style" or of respect for each other's work. However, conflicts were not necessarily perceived as only negative. When conflicts happened, they also provided opportunities for students to learn to resolve them.

#### Example 2.1a

Q3099: "I've had the opportunity to work in more groups with more coursemates and due to the experience of working with some of them, I am not so keen on working in mixed-culture groups as I was before. Some of them either lack a proper working style or don't respect the work of other people that leads to conflicts and ineffective work."

In Example 2.1b, a contribution from the Term 1 questionnaire, the student makes it clear that they have previous experiences of working with cultural others. This is used to support their opinion that it increases conflict.

#### Example 2.1b

Q1084: "... I've always enjoyed working with people from other cultural backgrounds. However, it does increase the amount of conflict (both positive and negative)."

#### Example 2.1c

Q3087: "... It was something I expected and minor conflicts within mixed-culture group work is normal and not always a bad experience."

In Example 2.1c, the student is looking back from a Term 3 perspective to conflicts that he or she describes as "minor", and "normal" and reflects on them as an experience that was "not always ... bad".

In the examples above, students did not perceive conflict as only negative but acknowledged that it could also have a positive aspect. "Minor conflict" was considered to be something to be expected during MGW. Previous research on GW

indicates that one of the motives for using GW is to provide a student-centred learning experience that allows students to develop their conflict resolution skills, which could benefit their employability in the long run (Caspersz, Skene, & Wu, 2002; Levin, 2004; Popov et al., 2012; Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2016). The fact that the students in the current study showed an increased ability to resolve conflict in group discussion, contributing to their long-term growth, helped them to see the encountering of conflict as a positive experience.

### **5.2.2 Communication and negotiation**

Previous studies have pointed out that GW helps students develop and improve students' communication skills and negotiation skills. Participants in this study reported the experience of working in multicultural groups was beneficial for their communication and negotiation skills from three levels.

#### Example 2.2a

I01.Q2 [Heidi]: "it made me realise that sometimes it takes a while for people to find their place in the group and be comfortable with sharing ideas but then once we all understand that for example a language barrier exists, or different communication styles, and we try and put that all out in the open, it works more smoothly. ... I learned to be more patient, and kind of how group dynamics need to be considered very carefully so everybody gets a chance to bring in their ideas."

First of all, MGW provided an environment for students to observe and experience different communication styles and contributed to developing their awareness of personal or cultural differences over a period of time of working together. As Heidi pointed out, smooth communication happened only after sufficient time to observe each other's communication behaviours, recognise the differences and "try to put that all out in the open" (Example 2.2a). The element of learning and improvement over a period of time was also mentioned by some other participants:

#### Example 2.2b

Q3005.2: "I was a little afraid and shy in the beginning but with the passage of time, I found it useful to work in a mixed culture group."

Secondly, it gave participants the chance to practise communication and negotiation when they were engaged in MGW tasks.



#### Example 2.2c

Q1067: “I have opened my mind a bit more and expanded my breath of respect. As well, I put more effort in my communication skills.”

#### Example 2.2d

Q3047: “I like group work experiences because they're difficult and represent an opportunity to develop my negotiation skills...”

#### Example 2.2e

Q3105: “...mixed-culture groups are an excellent way to develop one's personal skills: for non-natives it gives them an opportunity to speak out and become more comfortable conversing with native speakers (as some have a tendency to stick with people of their own culture); and for natives it gives them good practice at communicating in appropriate language, which is a vital skill for the workplace.”

In Example 2.2c one student talks about “putting more effort” into communication skills, and in Example 2.2d, another highlights the importance of “difficult” experiences such as GW for developing negotiation skills. Another student refers to communication skills as “personal skills” and differentiates between the developmental benefits for “non-natives” and “natives” (Example 2.2e). For the latter, this is “communicating in appropriate language” which the student describes as “a vital skill for the workplace”.

Thirdly, when students started putting more effort and thought into communication while working together, some reported having improved their ability over time to adjust their own communication styles when faced with different communication habits. In my interview with Leo, he described in detail how he adjusted his way of talking with different group members.

#### Example 2.2f

I03 [Leo]: “Yeah, I can be very loud with the Indian and very soft with Chinese... it's like I have different personality... so I speak four language and every time I speak different, I have different personality and if I speak English, if I speak with a soft, soft tone, soft accent, I will have this personality but if I speak with loud quick and like yeah, I have a different kind of personality.”

Leo explains that when he adjusts his style it is like having “a different personality” in each of the four languages he speaks. He also describes how speaking English in two different ways, either with a “soft tone” or “loud, quick” is like having two personalities in the same language (In Example 2.2f). He switched tone and volume based on who he was talking to, even when he was talking in English all the time.

MGW was perceived as very effective in developing communication and negotiation skills by the participants in this study. This finding is consistent with the benefits of communication skills reported in the literature on GW (Mello, 1993; Thorley & Gregory, 1994; Tribe, 1994; Burnapp, 2009). As the diversity in multicultural groups brought with it increased diversity in communication styles, participants learned to observe communication and negotiation, to be more aware, to make a greater effort to manage communication, and to adjust communication style according to their interlocutor(s).

### **5.2.3 Patience and respect towards group members**

Personal growth has been discussed in the literature as one of the benefits of MGW in HE (Robinson, 2006; Montgomery, 2009; Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2016). However, personal growth is a relatively general term which has not specifically focused on the ideas of patience and respect towards other group members – two aspects mentioned as part of personality difference in a multicultural group by Woods, Barker and Hibbins (2011). “Being patient and respectful” was perceived as a feature, a natural element that either existed or did not exist. Hardly any previous research has specifically discussed the development of patience and respect towards others as a result of interacting with different people in GW or MGW. In the present study, many participants commented that the experience of working in multicultural groups had helped them develop patience and respect towards each other.

#### Example 2.3a

Q3107.1: “I learnt to develop more trust toward my group members and I became less irritable concerning the working style of all the person I worked with.”

#### Example 2.3b

Q3114: “I am now more able to communicate with people from different background and I am less likely to lose patience when something annoys me.”

#### Example 2.3c

I08.2 [Zhenya]: “...I have become more patient and respecting others’ opinions and preferences since the beginning of the group works this year.”

One of the students reports becoming “less irritable” as well as more trusting (Example 2.3a), and another reports they are “less likely to lose patience” (Example 2.3b). Others, such as Zhenya (Example 2.3c), mention becoming more patient

along with finding they had more respect for other viewpoints. Both Example 2.3a and Example 2.3b were Questionnaire Term 3 responses, while Example 2.3c was from an interview with Zhenya in Term 3. This means the answers all reflect the actual experience of the whole academic year, and the development of patience and respect during the process of working together was highlighted in all three examples.

In the next three examples, students commented on how the change they observed in themselves was related to an improved ability to listen to others:

#### Example 2.3d

Q3098: “I listen a lot more, more patience”.

#### Example 2.3e

Q1051: “ability to listen to others. becoming more calm and patient. value other's opinion. better listening power.”

#### Example 2.3f

Q1109: “I am more patient, more careful to listen to others, especially how they express their ideas.”

The student in Example 2.3e linked patience and better listening with being able to “value” alternative opinions. Another student highlighted listening more carefully “especially [to] how [others] express their ideas” (Example 2.3f). This is important because awareness of *how* things are expressed shows the development of intercultural competence.

An increase in patience was additionally perceived to facilitate a better discussion environment for including everybody. In other words, more equal participation was promoted by this means, and this improved the relationship among group members:

#### Example 2.3g

I01.2 [Anneli]: “...So I think what has changed in a way is that I learned to be more patient, and kind of how group dynamics need to be considered very carefully so everybody gets a chance to bring in their ideas.”

#### Example 2.3h

Q3110: “...most of my native-speaker group mates are very nice and patient, they gave me a lot of respect and encourage.”

### Example 2.3i

Q3086.2: “When the understanding of each other getting deeper and the distance between each other getting shorter, it benefit the group work significantly. group members tend to understanding other's opinions and more patient to others. So team building like social work contributes a lot to achieve those changes.”

Along with becoming more patient themselves (Example 2.3g) students described other group members being patient (Example 2.3h and Example 2.3i) as something that benefitted the group and team. The student quoted in Example 2.3i commented that team building was “like social work” in the way it helped change people’s attitudes and behaviours.

This section has discussed the fact that through working in multicultural groups, the participants reported having become more patient towards others, learning to listen more and seeing the importance of patience and respect in creating a more inclusive environment for group discussion. This could contribute significantly to one’s personal growth, as indicated in previous research on the benefits of MGW (Robinson, 2006; Montgomery, 2009; Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2016). However, nurturing the growth of patience and respect should also stand out as a benefit of MGW on its own as “patience” and “respect” are the specific words chosen by participants when discussing their experience, rather than being generalised into the aspect of personal growth.

### **5.2.4 Intercultural skills development**

Multicultural group work provides opportunities for students of different cultural backgrounds to work together, especially when they are assigned to groups that they did not form themselves.

Jaime said that the experience of working in a multicultural group helped her to understand her subject (intercultural communication) better, as well as to meet people from countries that she had not experienced working with before. It was a new experience to learn to connect and communicate with these peers who were from different places.

#### Example 2.4a

I05 [Jaime]: "...for this in particular, for intercultural communication, I don't think anything has been more valuable than working with the other students, nothing. We're paying for that experience I feel like [department] is a great department but I think learning how to get along with other people and kind of getting over that hump of, I don't want to say like prejudice, because I never came in with like horrible stereotypes. To be honest, I'd never really met anyone that was Chinese before I came here, and so yeah, it was a new experience. But I think that getting to work with them definitely helped me get a better sense of the world."

Jaime here highlights that nothing was "more valuable" than working with students from other cultures. She illustrates this by explaining how being assigned to a multicultural group for her coursework provided a great opportunity for her to meet people from different places and help her to "get a better sense of the world" (Example 2.4a). This shows a motivation to explore outside of her comfort zone, to try to understand why other people or cultures are similar or different from herself. This motivation and enthusiasm about exploring difference is important to an individual's intercultural learning.

For Dhisha, this sense of the world extended to understanding more about politics between Asian countries (Example 2.4b).

#### Example 2.4b

I07 [Dhisha]: "... I learn something about politics between China, Hong Kong and Taiwan and I never knew about this before ...there was one person who said that Taiwan is a part of China, that was a Chinese, and then I spoke to a Taiwanese and said, 'What? We are definitely a separate country, we don't have anything to do with China'...my knowledge increased..."

Multicultural group work, when used as a compulsory learning activity, also provided a unique platform for students to communicate with people from different cultures, especially the ones from more "distant" cultures. Anneli compared her experience as a European student to the experience of her friend who was studying in a different university:

#### Example 2.4c

I02: [Anneli]: "I think this goes particularly for meeting Chinese students in my programme, I was comparing in fact with a friend studying at [university] in London and they often assign their groups themselves, and he has not made one Chinese friend during the whole year. They have not as big a ratio [of international students] as we do, but still a sufficient amount. If your academic studies connect, maybe it can be hard to find a common ground, we are here to study... many of the ones that today I count as my friends, have stemmed from group work."

Anneli's friend had not made a single friend from China, which Anneli attributes to student-assigned groups (Example 2.4c). Siri commented on the same issue of

on working with students that were from similar backgrounds versus other people as follows:

#### Example 2.4d

I04 [Siri]: “if you are in a mixed course... well most people tend to be friends with people from similar backgrounds, and if you’re not being forced to work with other people, you’re probably not going to, well some people aren’t at least.”

An important factor in addition to the ratio of international students is the allocation of groups, both mentioned by Anneli in Example 2.4c. Whereas Anneli talked about the allocation of groups in terms of having a choice, “they often assign their groups themselves”, in Example 2.4d, Siri talked about it in terms of *not* having a choice: “being forced to work with other people”. In different ways, both examples reflect the point that when students are given the choice of who to work with, they tend to choose co-nationals (Giles, 2012). However, when students work with students from other backgrounds (whether or not they choose to work with them), the findings offer evidence that they appreciate the opportunity to get to know their group members. Example 2.4e and Example 2.4f reflect this:

#### Example 2.4e

Q3013: “I have gained a broader understanding for the cultural differences in communication and working habitude. I have particularly gained a lot of new experience working with Chinese students. I also consider that type of learning environment extremely valuable for the future.”

#### Example 2.4f

Q3126: “In Warwick I have met far more people from Africa than before. I have always been open towards different cultures and enjoyed it, even when it was occasionally difficult to understand some peers with less good English. One should never underestimate their knowledge, though!”

In Example 2.4e, the student particularly mentions working with Chinese students as a new experience in a “valuable” learning environment. In Example 2.4f, meeting people from Africa is mentioned by another student in the context of enjoying being with people from different cultures.

These comments are consistent with the findings in Volet and Ang’s (1998) study that the experience of MGW enhances all students’ understanding and appreciation of other cultures. In some cases, “being forced” to work with students from different cultural backgrounds is necessary in order for students to gain an understanding of different cultures, communication styles and working styles.

Apart from learning about other cultures via working with other students, students also reported that they not only learnt that cultures can differ, but also that the behaviour of individuals from the same culture can also differ.

#### Example 2.4g

I02 [Anneli]: "...Yes, precisely, I think you learn, well as a group, like the general way of behaving in a certain culture. But also seeing like individual characteristics of people that can be from any culture and how they are reflected in their work.

Anneli's comment in Example 2.4g about noticing "individual characteristics of people that can be from any culture" reflects this understanding.

Learning that there are individual differences among people from the same culture is a particularly important step in developing intercultural skills. One reason is linked to cultural stereotypes. Working in multicultural groups can reinforce the negative stereotypes that students have about each other. However, exposure to a multicultural environment is necessary to provide students with opportunities to learn to challenge cultural stereotypes (De Vita, 2000), and the findings suggest that students were able to take advantage of these opportunities.

Another challenge reported by students was that when working in multicultural groups they need to use one language as a lingua franca. Leo described the challenge of using English to communicate with classmates in MGW as follows:

#### Example 2.4h

I03 [Leo]: "...In terms of how they perceive communication. Like everyone in my class, they use English as the second or the third language, so we have different perspective as well. And to get along and also don't forget that we only have met for a week and then we have holiday like for four weeks, so it's difficult for us to understand how we communicate with people from different background...even some people use English as their main language, they still have different perspectives of each word and how, yeah, so ..."

In Example 2.4h, Leo points out that "everyone" in his class is using English as a second or even a third language, but that even when using it as their "main" language, they might use it differently. Another challenge he notes is the limited contact time (only meeting the week before a long break), for them to get used to communicating with each other in the lingua franca. Learning how people of different cultural backgrounds have different ways of using English and how to manage different perspectives is part of developing intercultural skills.

Many other students also commented that they had learnt to recognise different working styles and communication styles in their group members from different cultures through MGW:

Example 2.4i

Q3118.2: “I also feel that I am learning the different style of each culture and now I know how to approach better group situations.”

Example 2.4j

I04 [Siri]: “Since starting my masters I have become more comfortable at working with a mixed culture group and have actually found it very interesting learning about cultural differences. Often cultural differences mean that people work in different styles and I have tried to embrace this and learn from them.”

In Example 2.4i the student comments on the benefit of recognising different cultural styles and in Example 2.4j Siri expresses that she has not only “tried to embrace” these cultural differences but also “learn from them”. Through MGW, students had the opportunity to practise dealing with the differences, and get ready for facing the challenges of working in diverse teams in the future.

Also, very importantly, students discovered similarities that they did not expect. One of these students was Siri:

Example 2.4k

I04 [Siri]: “...I think what I realised that we’re were more similar than we think, and you also learn how people express themselves. Some people don’t say a lot, but they still contribute a significant amount.”

Example 2.4l

I05.Q2 [Jaime]: “Now I realize that no matter how good the intent, some people are more difficult to work with than others, but I’ve also realized that this has little to do with culture.”

Siri draws attention to similarities between individuals (Example 2.4k) and so does Jaime. However, for Jaime these similarities are not necessarily a positive thing; people being “difficult to work with ... has little to do with culture” (Example 2.4l).

In addition to merely recognising the difference and similarities, some of them had also developed some awareness and skills about how to work better with other students in MGW:



#### Example 2.4m

I04.Q2 [Siri]: “I learned to listen better and to ask my peers more often about what they think. Generally developed more useful strategies.”

#### Example 2.4n

Q3107.2: “The most important is to take the time to listen everybody making their point and to really understand them and not to be afraid to ask peers to repeat if it is unclear.”

#### Example 2.4o

Q3048: “It gives you the opportunity to learn more about other cultures and be a better practitioner because you can be more inclusive. It can sometimes be a challenge for an individual but if you have a group with a mature attitude they should be able to support anyone struggling due to language barriers and add value to the assignment and to everyone's learning”.

#### Example 2.4p

Q3113: “...my time at Warwick has resulted in more experience with multicultural groups and given better understanding as to what can help with achieving an atmosphere conducive to good discussions and comprehension on subject matter.”

In Example 2.4m and Example 2.4n, listening is highlighted as an important skill that was developed, together with feeling able to ask their classmates for clarification. In Example 2.4o, the participant notes it can be a challenge for a single person to create a more inclusive atmosphere, but that a supportive group “with a mature attitude” can succeed. In Example 2.4p, the importance of “an atmosphere conducive to good discussions and comprehension” is mentioned again.

Other students reported that through working with others in MGW, they also experienced a lot of personal growth:

#### Example 2.4q

Q3106: “It was very significant experience for me. It helped me a lot in my working environment. I have learned to be more tolerant with other people way of thinking.”

#### Example 2.4r

Q3022: “Improved my ability to work within mixed-culture groups by broadening my understanding of the differences in various cultures towards problem solving, critical thinking and presentation of ideas.”

#### Example 2.4s

Q3047: “It has helped me to balance the expectations about the result that is achievable depending on the cultural mix.”

#### Example 2.4t

Q3070: “I have become more patient and tried to find different ways of communicating with people from other backgrounds. I have become more involved and was able to understand clearly their ideas by the end of our cooperation.”

Aspects of personal growth mentioned in these examples include becoming more tolerant (Example 2.4q), broadening understanding (Example 2.4r), balancing expectations (Example 2.4s), and becoming more patient and more involved (Example 2.4t).

Many students reported that because the experience of working in multicultural groups provided chances for them to interact with people of different cultural backgrounds, they became more comfortable sharing their opinions in the group:

#### Example 2.4u

Q3080.2: “I felt more comfortable and confident.”

#### Example 2.4v

Q3034.2: “I am more willing and comfortable to be in groups with people from other cultural backgrounds.”

#### Example 2.4w

Q3071: “I feel now more comfortable when working in mixed-culture group works compare to the beginning and I am more keen to share my ideas and opinions.”

Together with becoming more comfortable, students mentioned becoming “more confident” (Example 2.4u), “more willing” (Example 2.4v), and “more keen” to share their own perspectives (Example 2.4w) when working in multicultural groups.

I asked one participant to comment on the statement Working with students from other cultures puts me under pressure and makes me feel uncomfortable because her score changed significantly on this statement over the time of study:

#### Example 2.4x

I01 [Heidi]: “... I said yes before and now I'm saying no. This is because I learned how to do it, I think. It's really true because then it doesn't make you uncomfortable anymore if you figure out a way...”

She explained that the reason she no longer felt pressured when working with students from different cultures was because she had “learned how to do it”. This indicates that the previous pressure she experienced was caused by not knowing how to

manage difference, and the uncomfortable feelings gradually reduced as she got to know the group members and figured out how to work with them.

Many other participants also reported having learnt how to work better in multicultural groups in the future through their experience gained at this university.

#### Example 2.4y

Q3027: “I am ready to embrace cultural differences. I am more open to have cross-cultural teams. One individual who does not work is not representative of the whole culture/country. Overall: I would love to be a part of cross-cultural teams.”

#### Example 2.4z

Q3029: “I had a set of notions before I started my MBA. After getting to know different people from different cultures and nationalities, I am now better equipped to adapt myself and work in an international and increasingly globalized environment.”

It helped them to be “more open” (Example 9y), and “better equipped to adapt” (Example 9z) for working in multicultural teams in the future, as well as to see differences in individuals rather than national stereotypes based on the behaviour of one unrepresentative person.

In this section, a series of examples were presented to illustrate how students had developed their intercultural skills from different perspectives by through undergoing multicultural group work. Different participants described acquiring a better appreciation of other cultures and cultural differences, discovering features that contradicted their stereotypes; gaining a better sense of the world and country-specific knowledge, and forming intercultural friendships in the process.

Some of them also reported encountering challenges regarding differences in language ability, communication and work styles. However, they also reported learning to overcome the challenges by working through the differences, and most importantly by appreciating the challenges and acknowledging the fact that they had learnt from them. Some participants reported on personal growth such as learning to be more tolerant and balancing expectations better. All the above are important learning points for developing intercultural competence and the participants demonstrated they had developed considerable intercultural skills that will help them to work and communicate better in a multicultural environment. This finding is again consistent with previous research on the benefits of MGW to

students' intercultural skills development (Volet & Ang, 1998; De Vita, 2000; Knight, 2004).

### 5.2.5 Preparation for the future workplace

As discussed in the last section, MGW is a well-perceived experience for students' development of intercultural skills that will become critical to their future employability. Previous research has highlighted that one of the benefits of working in a multicultural team is preparing students for the future international workplace where they will be required to work collaboratively with colleagues from different cultures (Caspersz, Skene, Wu, & Boland, 2004). Many participants in this study confirmed that their MGW experience would be beneficial for their future:

#### Example 2.5a

Q3048: "... Group work is about communication of various types which is an essential skill for the workplace."

#### Example 2.5b

I02 [Anneli]: "Yes, I definitely agree, it's a preparation for what is coming after and I think probably the intercultural workplaces, it will just increase all the time..."

#### Example 2.5c

I04 [Siri]: "Yeah, because if you're working in an international workplace, of course you work with other countries, if not how would you know how to handle problems and conflict and different perceptions, different point of views. You wouldn't know if you never had any experience and the mind wasn't really open to understanding how people see it differently. It just makes sense."

In Example 2.5a, a student describes it as "an essential skill", and in Example 2.5b, Anneli highlights that it is "preparation for what is coming after", "the intercultural workplaces". In Example 2.5c, Siri draws on common-sense understandings about the international workplace: "of course you work with other countries, if not how would you know how to handle problems and conflict and different perceptions?". Example 2.5d shows how a student with 11 years of experience of working in international organisations responded when asked about the value of the experience of working in a diverse team:

#### Example 2.5d

I07 [Dhisha]: “I think it’s good because nowadays people expect this, even in a job interview they expect it, ‘OK, have you worked with people from different cultures, from international ...’, you can say, ‘Yes’, so this is more from a CV point of view.”

In Example 2.5d, Dhisha offers insights from her previous industrial experience about what employers expect. She quotes a typical job interview question to illustrate how important working “with people from different cultures” is to modern employers.

In Example 2.5a and Example 2.5b the participants evaluated the experience of MGW as good for future workplaces, so it is possible they were students who had limited work experience. Siri in Example 2.5c was an international student who had some internship experience. Disha in Example 2.5d was studying for her MBA and had a significant amount of industry experience. All of them perceived MGW as positive and adding benefits to better prepare them for the future workplace, regardless of their own previous work experience.

#### **5.2.6 Section conclusion**

The analysis of data presented section 5.2 has focused on the way in which the participants perceived MGW as contributing to their skills development. They reported that the experience was especially beneficial to their conflict resolution skills as they learnt to resolve the conflicts occurring when working together. Communication and negotiation skills were also frequently reported as being practised during group discussion. The development of patience and respect towards other group member as time goes by was highlighted as a finding in this research that has not been much reported on in the literature. Participants also provided many examples on how they had learned to work in a multicultural environment, and how this led to the practising and growth of their intercultural skills. These skills were seen as important in preparing them for the future workplace, both by students with limited working experience as well as those with years of industry experience.

In sections 5.1 and 5.2, I reported mainly on the benefits perceived by participants in this study of working in multicultural groups and considered how the findings

compared with the results reported in the literature. In section 5.3, I will discuss the challenges encountered by the participants involved in MGW.

### 5.3 Perceived challenges of multicultural group work

The benefits of working in multicultural groups perceived by the participants in study has been discussed in the previous sections of this chapter. In this section, the challenges encountered by the participants while completing their multicultural group work will be discussed. Ten themes emerged from the data relating to the perceived challenges of multicultural group work, namely, group assessment weighting and assignment workload, group members' relationships, clash of personalities, reaching consensus, individual or group assessment, language proficiency, different communication styles, different working styles, and negative stereotypes. These challenges comprise different sources of conflict during MGW.

Conflict has been reported as one of the most common challenges encountered by students when participating in multicultural group work (Reynolds, 1994; Caspersz, Skene, & Wu, 2002; Turner, 2009; Popov et al., 2012 and Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2016). However, while the literature has reported heavily on how conflict affected students' experience and the demand on their conflict management skills, few have described in depth what the actual conflicts were that students experienced. As discussed in section 5.2.1, participants in the current study reported gaining conflict resolution skills via working through the conflicts they encountered. In this section, I will focus mainly on what has been reported by the participants as conflict and what contributed to conflict during their MGW.

#### 5.3.1 Group assessment weighting and assignment workload

As participant accounts show, the risk of conflict increased if assignments were group-assessed, especially when this assessment made up a large proportion of their mark. In these situations, disagreements in the discussion were more likely to turn into conflicts or be perceived as conflicts by the participants.

In her interview, Ivanka said that how the MGW was assessed definitely changed how she worked with and how she thinks of her group members.

### Example 3.1a

I06 [Ivanka]: "... because you try to be as nice as you can to people you meet, when you're not working with them, so there is no conflict. But doing work when you know your marks are riding on it, you start to care, you start to mind every little thing, so being late, as I said, if we're hanging out, it's fine if you're late, if we're doing work, it's a conflict, that's part of it... I've done a non-assessed assignment in Term 1, which was a group thing, it was a tiny thing, it was one meeting thing but somebody didn't show up but because it's not assessed, and because it's not so big a deal, you're like it's not very nice of them, but who cares? You know, so there is no conflict..."

She compared assessed work where "you start to care, you start to mind every little thing" with non-assessed work, where "it's not so big a deal" (Example 3.1a). Ivanka gave an example of a situation where she did not mind a "little thing"; for example, on social occasions, someone being late was not important. When the MGW was not assessed, even when a group member missed the meeting, she considered the behaviour was "not nice...but who cares". When the MGW was assessed, it made her pay more attention to the way group members behaved: simply "being late" constituted a source of conflict for her. Thus, whether or not a task was assessed changed her expectations and evaluations of her group members' behaviour. Socialising with classmates and engaging in non-assessed and assessed MGW could be experienced by the same group of students over a very short period of time; for example, the same group of students would eat lunch together between classes, they would have a group discussion in class, and continue to work on an assessed group report for their module after class. Students who think like Ivanka likely hold different implicit standards of behaviour that are, however, not necessarily communicated explicitly to their group members. This means that some students might have the same attitudes and demonstrate the same behaviour on all three occasions without understanding the different consequences attached to the same behaviour in a slightly different context. If the different standards and expectations of group members are not communicated well, as in the group referred to in Example 11a, conflicts are likely to arise.

Example 3.1a shows that whether the MGW is assessed or not has an impact on how students choose to interact with group members. The next example shows that how many marks the MGW carries further affects how the participant deals with the interaction with group members:

### Example 3.1b

I05 [Jaime]: "... from term one to term two, I think the stakes are just much higher and people are just under much, it's more difficult and they're under more pressure, and so I think term one versus term two, I think it's a combination between like the pressure, getting to know people better, maybe getting to express yourself a bit more honestly. And then also we just had more group work in term two, and that was worth more. It was actually worth grades, worth marks, so that was a little bit more high stakes than, okay just do like a group presentation next week with like one slide. That's not a big deal, but then suddenly it's like yeah, a third of your final mark, so do it well."

In Example 3.1b, Jaime compares her experience of different group projects: one a group presentation to which she only needed to contribute one PowerPoint slide, and another that was worth one third of her final module mark. When group assignments were "actually worth grades", she experienced more conflict in MGW as the stakes were higher. She also observed that in Term 2, because students were now more familiar with each other, it could mean "getting to express yourself a bit more honestly". This implies that students were being more direct in giving each other negative feedback. When some students became more direct, how the negative feedback was delivered, and how this "more honest" approach was perceived by its audience, also could become a source of conflict. In addition, the students not only faced a heavier workload in the second term, but the assignments in Term 2 were "more difficult" as Jamie described. This could mean that students found themselves in a situation where the MGW tasks became increasingly complex thus requiring more cooperation, while the time pressure and workload demands also increased. All these factors need to be taken into account in trying to understand the rising conflicts among group members. Jamie's MGW experience (Example 3.1b) shows that it is not only the marks of the assignments that may have an impact on how seriously the students take the group interaction but also the point in the academic year when the assignments arise, the difficulty of the assignment itself, and the students' own workload that can affect their MGW experience.

### **5.3.2 Group members' relationships**

Forming relationships between group members is one of the reasons MGW is considered a good tool for helping students form intercultural friendships and is thus often promoted as part of the internationalisation agenda in HE (Sweeney et al., 2008; Montgomery, 2009; Spencer-Oatey & Dauber, 2016). Yet, the reality in MGW is often far more complicated than this ideal scenario. In fact, the data from the current study suggests that MGW can even threaten pre-existing relationships



rather than promote new ones. Dhisha narrates an incident of how a pre-existing friendship between two members fell apart through MGW, which led to conflicts in the group:

#### Example 3.2a

I07 [Dhisha]: "... two people in the group were friends, they were always together, but after working on the groups, because they had different opinions and different ideas, they slowly started drifting apart, and they started having open confrontations during the group work. The others were thinking, 'What? These two were so... they were friends and now what's happening?'"

In this group, these two friends who were "always together" in the beginning as Dhisha described, then started to "drift apart" as they started having "different opinions and different ideas" in the group discussions. Being apparently unable to properly resolve their task disagreements seems to have impacted on their relationship overall leading to larger scale "open confrontations" in group meetings in the later stages of their working time together (Example 3.2a). Dhisha quoted what her other group members were saying to each other, "they were friends and now what's happening?" to reflect their astonishment at the deterioration of this friendship. Other group members ended up concentrating less on task-focused discussions and more on trying to understand the change in the interaction between the two former friends. Additionally, the tension between the two and their open confrontations likely affected how comfortable team members felt in the team, and thus their performance and desire to participate. Their conflict clearly affected the dynamic of the whole group and became a distraction, interfering with the efficiency of their work as a group. This is an example in which conflict between two members not only undermined a pre-existing friendship but also drew attention away from the discussion of the work itself, which made a huge impact on the group dynamic. While Reynolds (1994) acknowledges that pre-existing relationships have an impact on the group dynamic he does not go into any depth regarding these dynamics, especially in regard to conflict.

### **5.3.3 Clash of personalities**

Personality clashes have been reported as one of the difficulties students experienced when working in groups, regardless whether members were from one

single culture or different ones (Levin, 2004). Many participants in this study also reported the clash of personalities they encountered in MGW as difficult:

Example 3.3a

Q1124: "...the most difficult part though is dealing with some characters."

Example 3.3b

Q3112.1: "...one arrogant individual can throw the whole assignment off course to the detriment of all..."

Example 3.3c

Q3112.2: "It is often not the different culture that is a problem it is the personalities that make Group work difficult. A bossy group member can take over the Group and bring down morale and force through their ideas."

Example 3.3d

Q3099: "...Some of them either lack a proper working style or don't respect the work of other people what leads to conflicts and ineffective work."

Participants reported difficulties in dealing with "some characters" (Example 3.3a), such as individuals who were "arrogant" (Example 3.3b), "bossy" (Example 3.3c) or disrespectful (Example 3.3d). In Example 3.3a, the participant was possibly avoiding using an overtly negative description of some of their group members by saying there are "some characters". The participant still used the expression "dealing with" them, as if the people they were referring to require special and extra attention, and described the interaction with them as "the most difficult part" of MGW. The comments in both Example 3.3b and Example 3.3c suggest that it only takes one difficult person to compromise the work process for the entire group. Example 3.3d is an explicit statement that disrespectful group members were one of the reasons for conflicts in the group. It is worth pointing out that Example 3.3c is a participant's Term 3 Questionnaire response to the question "How has your attitude changed towards MGW since the beginning of this course?", and therefore reflects the respondent's MGW experience through the entire academic year; the emphasis on "a bossy group member" and "not the cultural difference" suggest that this participant considers it is more difficult to deal with clash of personalities rather than cultural difference in a group.

### 5.3.4 Efficiency or quality as different priorities

A division-of-labour type of approach is very common among students when it comes to MGW, especially when there was more time pressure at particular stages of their degree studies (Summers & Volet, 2010). For some participants in this research, efficiency was reported as an important benefit of working in groups.

#### Example 3.4a

I03 [Leo]: “Yeah, you can split up the task, you do that, you do that, you do this, yeah, it’s quick, it’s efficient.”

#### Example 3.4b

Q3068: “... after several group discussion or group work, I found it interesting, comfortable and efficient to work in mix-culture group.”

#### Example 3.5c

Q1022: “It can be interesting and efficient, because different people can come up with different and better ideas on the same question. Three heads are better than one, no matter where the group mates come from.”

This was because it was felt that group members could share the tasks (Example 3.4a and 3.4b) and generate multiple ideas, as “three heads are better than one, no matter where the group mates come from” (Example 3.5c).

The above participants reported that it was easier to choose to only focus on what could be considered necessary to complete the assignment in time, even when they acknowledged that they could have benefitted more from the discussion if they had made more efforts to engage with the content. This reflects the findings of Summers and Volet (2010). When efficiency is chosen as the priority, any differences are perceived as factors that hinder the group work process, which could be a very important reason why some students described MGW as useful but ineffective. Some of them pointed out that the group work process should be managed and organised better to achieve this efficiency:

#### Example 3.4d

Q3032: “I do appreciate the group work but the group needs a leader who coordinates the group to work more efficient.” The importance of a leader to coordinate the group is highlighted in Example 3.4d. Some other students considered that differences in culture were slowing down the MGW progress:

#### Example 3.4e

Q3121.1: “Working with mates from similar culture background is more efficient.”

The point is made in Example 3.4e by stating that “similar culture background” is efficient, by comparison.

However, not every student considered efficiency as a priority in MGW. Example 1.4c below was previously discussed in section 5.1.4 on creativity, and here Heidi considers creativity and better quality of the assignment outcome as important benefits of MGW:

#### Example 1.4c

I01[Heidi]: “... I think [MGW is] not at all efficient, it’s not efficient but it’s more productive, more creative and it will possibly lead to a better outcome if you work in a group, but it’s not more efficient, I think it can work.”

On the one hand Heidi says that MGW is “not at all efficient”, while on the other hand she emphasises that it is “more productive” and “more creative” and can enrich the outcome of the MGW.

When there are conflicting priorities, such as efficiency versus creativity, conflict can arise unless this difference is well-balanced by the group members.

### **5.3.5 Reaching consensus**

One statement in the questionnaire was It was difficult to reach a consensus when working on group assignments, which was adapted from an item in Volet’s (2016) SAGA instrument. In Term 1 this statement had a Mean of 3.81(N = 126, SD=1.42), in Term 3 it had a Mean of 3.67(N = 126, SD=1.40). Even though the Term 3 Mean was lower, suggesting that the students found it less difficult to reach a consensus during MGW over the course of their study, the Term 3 score is still 3.67, which is above 3.5 on a 6-point Likert-scale. This means most participants still considered reaching consensus in group discussion a difficult process. This led to formulating the question on reaching consensus in the Term 3 interviews, which were conducted after my analysis of the quantitative data: the participants were asked if they found reaching consensus difficult in their group discussion. One interviewee, Siri, explained her view of factors that have an impact on the process of consensus building.

### Example 3.5a

I04 [Siri]: “I think it also depends on how up front people are, and the more you know about what’s going on, the easier it is to reach a consensus. But then some people just comply because why shouldn’t they, because they haven’t really started doing it, they could also be a problem.”

Example 3.5a refers to the role of information-sharing, and how more sharing would make the process of reaching consensus “easier”. When Siri talks about the importance of being or not being “up front [about] what’s going on”, she is also implying that other group members may have concealed the amount of effort they have put into the work, in fact may not have even “started doing it”. Interestingly, she identifies the last point as something that would also increase the chance of reaching consensus. If group members had different working speeds, the ones who started later would be more likely to agree with the students who had already made some progress.

Dhisha provided a different perspective, by telling a story about a recent project:

### Example 3.5b

I07 [Dhisha]: “Well, it is really difficult because everybody has their own opinion. I can give an example. One of our recent projects was deciding on [topic], whether it is justified or not. So, as it happens with every individual, each of us has a different opinion so the opinion was divided three to two, some of us said, ‘Yes, it is justified’, some of us thought, but it’s hard to reach a consensus, I would say. But, even if we had a three-two split, it doesn’t mean that we disagreed or we had an unhappy environment or something leads to conflict, there was no conflict, we were still working smoothly. OK, so, it’s really hard to reach a consensus. I would say that with anybody”.

In this situation, her group was attempting to reach an agreement on a question topic that had a clear and unambiguous yes/no answer. Dhisha explains that the difficulty of reaching a consensus was that everyone “has a different opinion so the opinion was divided” (Example 3.5b). However, despite this “three-two split” she emphasises that “we were still working smoothly”. In other words, she did not perceive the difficulty of reaching consensus as a source of conflict and importantly, she felt that it did not have any impact on the relationships among the group members. So in this case, the conflict was a task-related disagreement and it was not a source of negative conflict in their group interaction. When Dhisha says “OK, so it’s really hard” she concedes again that reaching consensus is difficult. Interestingly, she adds that “I would say that with anybody” which, based on her other contributions, can be interpreted to mean that from her perspective, culture or nationality are not factors in making it difficult to reach consensus.

For Ivanka, it was important to point out that a compromise should not be confused with a consensus. To explain the distinction, she described her previous experience of group work when working with her friends in her own country.

#### Example 3.5c

I06 [Ivanka]: "...I do compromise, it's just that I feel, I don't think a compromise where you just shut up is a consensus, which is what happens in most cases. I've had really good work group experience back in my undergrad when I was working with my friends, in that case there was consensus in the way that we shouted at each other and we fought a lot because we were friends first of all, and a group second of all, so it was fine, you could be as aggressive as you can but the result of it, this is going to sound a bit bad but because you're not trying to be nice and this whole consensus and compromise and politeness thing isn't in the middle, you actually express yourself and that way you come to a consensus. Whereas here, it's mostly usually one person who is like more assertive than the other and the other just steps back, that's not a consensus."

In her opinion, "a compromise where you just shut up", "where one person is like more assertive ... and the other just steps back", as she described group discussion in the UK university, should not be considered a consensus (Example 3.5c). In contrast, reaching a consensus was achieved in a different way in a "really good" group work experience like the ones she had before. It meant being able to shout and argue "because we were friends first of all". Her previous experience with her co-national group members involved this different style of interaction, which was much less focused on maintaining a harmonious relationship in the group. Ivanka perceived directness and openness as advantages, and "this politeness thing" as a disadvantage. She emphasised that with friends it was possible to "actually express yourself", which recalls what another participant, Jaime, described in Example 3.1b. She reported that when she became familiar with her group members it meant "getting to express yourself a bit more honestly". Both these students adjusted their communication strategies based on the relationship they had with their groupmates.

From the above examples, two reasons emerge as to why students found reaching consensus difficult in MGW. Firstly, students had different understandings of what a consensus is: compromising to reach a solution in order to move forward is different from actually agreeing with each other after discussing different perspectives on the matter. Secondly, after clarifying the shared definition of consensus within the group, reaching a consensus requires students to actively observe the interaction and adjust their communication strategies. They would need to understand what other group members mean first, then employ a way of communication that could actually allow the message to be understood, either an

agreement or a disagreement. If students were under time pressure and a heavy workload, they might not have enough time and energy to invest in observing how other group members function and actively adjust how they communicate with each other. Not being able to understand how to reach a consensus might have a negative impact on the group discussions and on how the members interact within the group, thus possibly forming a vicious circle of communication. Understanding why students consider reaching consensus to be difficult could be helpful in providing them with communication skills support to help them understand that the time saved on not learning how others communicate could actually make group discussion more difficult than it needs to be.

### 5.3.6 Assessment: Individual or group

Being assessed as a group is a particular worry for students aiming for good grades. As discussed earlier in this chapter, when students focused on their grades as the outcome of MGW, it made them pay more attention to complete the group work well. It could also result in them expecting more from group members because they were assessed as one group, getting the same score. And if students believe that they received a mark that was lower than they deserved, they would feel that their score had been dragged down by other students.

#### Example 3.6a

I06 [Ivanka]: “Yes, I strongly agreed with that... [My group mates would drag my score down if we were assessed as a group] It’s a very negative statement to be honest but I do feel like sometimes, it’s not that it’s dragging my score down, it’s just that working as a group, you tend to do worse than you would do when you’re alone, when you’re alone, you give 100% and you get what you deserve, whereas with a group you can give 150% and get what the other person deserves”.

Ivanka acknowledged that she had “strongly agreed” with the descriptor but preferred to say only that there was a tendency “to do worse than you would do when you are alone” despite putting in more effort. She contrasts “what you deserve” with “what the other person deserves” (Example 3.6a), implying that the first would be lower than the second.

Working in groups also means students need to work out their different approaches to complete the assignment. The mark the MGW carried would have an impact on

how students decide whose ideas are better and how they reach an agreement on the approach and tasks relating to the project.

#### Example 3.6b

I07 [Dhisha]: "...because there is a lot of disagreement and each person would want to do it their way so I would really say that, so, if I had to do an assignment, everything would be consistent...But if five of us had to do it, the whole assignment would be from five different angles and even the flow would be different. Because each of us would, we would just split the tasks, so for example, you write the introduction, I write the conclusion, somebody writes something else and they would all be different and the style would be different, the language would be different, the flow would be different. So, and when you put all these five pieces together and grade it as a single assignment, it doesn't seem like a single assignment, it seems like five different assignments..."

As Dhisha points out, because group members "would just split the tasks" and because each of them would want to approach their part of the task in different ways and writing styles, involving considerable disagreement, the result could seem "like five different assignments" (Example 3.6b). When different sections are completed by different members of the group, students find it difficult to accept a mark based on the quality of someone else's work.

The concerns over the quality of other group members' input has an impact on how students perceive the fairness of MGW assessments and this can potentially increase the probability of conflict in the group work interaction. Some lecturers provide the option that students could ask to be assessed individually, although they still have to complete the work in a group. One option is for students to indicate which part of the report or presentation they completed, and get a mark for that part. From the lecturers' perspective, it is a good solution because home students can no longer hold on to the misconception that international students would drag their scores down in MGW. In fact, it has been reported in other studies that the mark awarded for MGW is more of a reflection of the most able group member rather than the least able group member (De Vita, 2002).

However, students in the present study seemed to have a very different perception of this solution. Dhisha pointed out that it would be difficult to assess individual contributions towards the whole group project, and it would also have an impact on the group dynamics if people were judged separately:



### Example 3.6c

I07 [Dhisha]: "... unless everybody contributes it's going to be really hard, and there is going to be ego issues as well. 'I attended six meetings, you attended only two', kind of ego issues."

She suggested that there would be conflict due to "ego issues" between students claiming that they had made a greater contribution than other group members, for example by attending more meetings (Example 3.6c). It is interesting to see that in Example 3.6b, Dhisha commented at length on why she thought the mark for the group project was not as good as that for her individual assignment; yet, in Example 3.6c, she was opposed to individual assessment of the MGW as she believed it might increase conflict within the group.

Another participant, Katie, was strongly against being assessed individually. She gave a hypothetical example of why it could be unfair to do this:

### Example 3.6d

I09 [Katie]: "...when you divided up the work, not everybody is going to be the same level of difficulty. It cannot be assessed on that because let's say I took on a part of the project which had less research on it, so obviously my answer might be smaller and more opinionated, compared to yours which is more theoretical and then maybe you designed the presentation and I wrote the group work, or maybe you designed the presentation and then I presented it, how am I going to be assessed on actually presenting it while you're just being assessed on designing? Because everyone puts in their fair attempt and does the work to the best of their ability and we all agree that this is the finished product, so I guess that's why I say that it wouldn't be good to judge individually".

Her reasons included that the total effort could never be divided equally, partly because different group members were in charge of different parts of the process and others might contribute in different ways to those parts, so "it wouldn't be good to judge individually" (Example 3.6d). It was not straightforward to assess people's contributions because everybody brought a different skill set into MGW. In addition, some of the work could be presented as a final product but work that was completed during the process would be unseen in the end product, so it would be not fair to judge group members' contribution based on the final presentation or report, which was how MGW projects are most commonly assessed. As Katie said, "how am I going to be assessed on actually presenting it while you're just being assessed on designing?"

Between the Term 1 questionnaire and the Term 3 questionnaire responses, Anneli's response to the statement Group assignments should be assessed on an

individual basis saw a change from they should be assessed individually to they shouldn't. When I asked why she changed her opinion, she explained:

Example 3.6e

I02 [Anneli]: "Yes, it is the responsibility of the group, right, so even in my experience, the bad one, if the final product is wrong, it's also my own fault that I didn't speak up earlier and tell my team members that there needed to be an improvement, so you cannot really blame one person or a couple of persons for a bad final project. That's why I disagreed to the statement".

In Example 3.6e, Anneli suggests that "the responsibility of the group" for the final product includes each person's individual responsibility for speaking up and for telling the others that improvements were needed.

After several experiences of MGW throughout the degree course, Siri also changed her attitude towards the assessment of MGW. It is worth mentioning here that in one of her modules, she worked in a diverse team that was formed by students' own choice of members. But at the last minute, the day before their deadline, someone in the group asked to be assessed individually.

Example 3.6f

I04 [Siri]: "Perhaps I've just grown throughout the experience and learned to understand that it is not an individual work...even I think negative like group experience, maybe with the truly extreme case that I've had, after assessing it on my own, I realised that I could have done something about it earlier and it was not, you know, just up to that other person because if he's happy with the lower score and he prefers to dedicate time to other things, then I guess at that point, it would have been my responsibility to say something and not expect that he will be able to read between the lines of how I am feeling."

When Siri reflected on all her MGW experience, including the "truly extreme case" (Example 3.6f) mentioned above, like Anneli she takes responsibility for not having "done something about it earlier". Both Siri and Anneli acknowledge that they were not direct enough in communicating their feelings during their respective projects. Anneli refers to "not tell[ing] her team members that there needed to be an improvement" (Example 3.6e) and Siri to "not expect[ing] that he will be able to read between the lines" (Example 3.6f).

Neither Siri nor Anneli came to believe that MGW should be assessed individually, however, and both of them identified what they would do differently next time. They came to learn that all group members should share the responsibility for addressing any conflicts in more open conversations, in the same way they share responsibility for the group's final grade.

The mark the MGW carried would have an impact on how students decide whose ideas are better and how they reach an agreement on the approach and tasks relating to the project. Working in groups also means students need to work out their different approaches to completing the assignment. However, it is not always easy for every student to accomplish the challenge of resolving difference. The next two extracts in this section come from the interview with Heidi, in which she shared a journey of thought from believing assessing group work individually is against the point of MGW, to encountering disagreement with group members and worrying that her mark would be dragged down, to deciding not to ask the module tutor to assess her individually in the end:

#### Example 3.6h

I01 [Heidi]: “So group work is about finding the ability to work efficiently with people from different cultural backgrounds and being able to create something good in collaboration ... so I think if it were [assessed individually] ... that would defeat the whole point of group work if you would say in the beginning, “you have to do this group work but everybody is assessed individually”, that would defeat the whole purpose of having group work because you know, then people are like well, what are we working for together anyway, we’re all assessed individually so you do this, you do this, I do that and let’s never meet again, that’s not the point of group work, so that’s why.

Heidi provides various reasons why individual assessment “would defeat the whole point of having group work” (Example 3.6h). She describes this point or purpose as “the way in which you come to terms with the fact that people are different and how you work in a multicultural team” and she implies that individual assessment would make it harder for students to create a piece of coherent work. In the second extract (Example 3.6i), she explains why she considered asking to be individually assessed herself:

#### Example 3.6i

I01 [Heidi]: “...then we had this other group work, because I had this thing with this girl and she thought this was correct and I thought this was correct, and we managed to combine somehow but not really, so that’s why I think I said I think it should be assessed individually because in that particular instance, if you have group work and there’s a conflict where you can’t come to an agreement, then maybe the only way out is to try and have it assessed individually. That’s exactly what it was, I thought she was wrong and I wouldn’t want her work to be assessed as if it was my work , so that’s why...

...I was really considering talking to [tutor name], to get it assessed individually but in the end I decided not to...Because I think it’s counterproductive to the kind of what group work is all about because it’s about doing something collaboratively”

This occurred to her when a conflict between herself and another student happened during the group work process and couldn’t be resolved. Heidi suggests that in a

situation like this, individual assessment is “maybe the only way out” (Example 3.6i). However, she decided not to go through with requesting an individual assessment, because she believed this action would not resolve her problem, and it would be “counterproductive” to the collaborative aim of MGW.

The above extracts from Heidi’s interview suggest that she had a good understanding of the purpose of MGW and what she personally wanted to gain from working in groups, as well as being considerate to the whole group and not doing things that would defer the whole process of MGW. This student was not only observant enough to understand her situation and dilemma, but also actually spent time to weigh her options and decide on what she thought was most productive for this group. Within the data set, this student stands out as she seems particularly mature; however, it would not be realistic to expect every single student to think and behave in a similar manner. If students who had already experienced difficulties in interacting with group members (see, for example, the conflict discussed in 5.3.1 and the complexities involved in reaching consensus in MGW discussed in 5.3.5) and perceived a threat to their grades, it seems likely that they would choose the seemingly easier option of choosing individual assessment methods to secure a higher mark rather than putting more effort into resolving possible issues within the group. The fact that some students were convinced they would get a higher mark if assessed individually suggests that the criteria for assessing the MGW should probably place more emphasis on the consistency of the product of MGW, and possibly incorporate more elements relating to the nature of the interaction among group members.

The previous examples in this section all show students’ concern over the fairness of group assessment and mirror their worries about their marks being influenced by others in a negative way. In the following three examples, taken from the final interview with Wei in Term 3, this participant provided some perspectives from a student who did not consider himself as the most capable in a group

#### Example 3.6j

I15 [Wei]: “the foreigners they want to get jobs here, so they have requirements for their mark. Us Chinese, we don’t really say it out loud, but if we did, it would be that 50 is ok, you get it?...but personally I want something no less than 60...”

### Example 3.6k

I15 [Wei]: “Right now this mark has no further influence, so I will just go with it, as long as I tried.”

Researcher: “Because it does not affect you in the future?”

I15 [Wei]: “Yeah, 50 is all right...”

In Example 3.6j and Example 3.6k, Wei talks about people having different standards for getting a mark for a group assignment. His understanding of students who are not Chinese was they want good marks because “they have requirements”, in other words, the marks they get from this degree have a direct impact on their future employability. He explained that the specific mark he gets from this degree would have no impact on his future career as long as he managed to pass, which he suggests was probably why many of his Chinese classmates only wanted a pass. Despite the fact that he just needed a pass, he set his own standard to be “no less than 60”. To achieve a pass on a PGT course in this university requires a minimum of 50% on all modules and a final project or dissertation; 60-69% would be commonly categorised as a merit for a postgraduate degree, although for some courses the requirement might be 65-69%. Marks of 70% and above would be awarded a distinction. For those students whose future careers are dependent on their marks, they are likely aiming as high as possible. Therefore, when the students who wish to achieve 70% for an assignment work with those who only aim for 50%, the standard and quality of the MGW as well as the time that team members are willing to invest might differ severely leading to conflict and the renegotiation of goals and set targets. As explained in section 3.4, Chinese students are the largest cohort of international students in PGT courses in the university where this research was conducted. In Wei’s course that year, more than half of his classmates were Chinese. The non-Chinese students who wanted to achieve high marks for their MGW may have been struggling more when they were placed into groups that had members who simply wanted a pass.

### Example 3.6l

Researcher: “any concerns over your mark might be dragged down by others?”

I15 [Wei]: It depends, if everybody has tried, then that’s fine. If people tried but have limited IQs, what can you do?

Researcher: Do you wish to get assessed based on the entire performance on the group or individually?

I15 [Wei]: I am no longer the most capable student in the group, so now, if I could get the same mark as the best students, it sounds great.... Now I am very humbled”.

When he was asked if he worried about his score being dragged down by other students (Example 3.6l), Wei expressed that he would be happy to receive the same mark as the most capable person in the group, because it was no longer himself as in his previous studies. He also explained that as long as people make an effort to contribute to the group work, then they should get the same assessment as whole group. Incidentally, the expression this student used in Mandarin to say “the most capable student”, can be directly translated as “the big thigh” (大腿). It is a reference to Buddha’s thigh, as there is a saying in China that when people need something urgently they go to the temples to hug Buddha’s thigh to express their love, hoping the Buddha, who is in charge of benefits to the world, will give them better treatment. The participant chose a humorous expression to express how he was “humbled” by “the best students” in his group. This indicates his motivation to learn from the better students and his hope of reaching their level. This suggests the kind of student-centred collaborative learning that is one of the benefits of MGW.

The examples in this section provide insights into the attitudes and experiences of group members regarding the assessment of MGW. Students’ concerns about their mark being brought down by others was the main reason why they preferred to be assessed individually. In Li and Campbell’s (2008) study, L2 students were blamed by L1 students for their poor marks in group assessments. In the present study, language proficiency was not explicitly stated as a reason for low marks (with one exception). However, the impact of language proficiency on group discussions was discussed at length by Li and Campbell (2008) and will be discussed in the next section.

In general, however, this section has shown that the language backgrounds of the group members and where they were from were not considered as the reason why

some participants worried about their mark. Nevertheless, most of the participants were happy to work together, and felt that being assessed individually was unfair and counterproductive to MGW. Even in the cases where Heidi was considering asking for individual assessment and Siri's group members asked for individual assessment at the last minute, neither participant indicated after completing their modules that they opposed group assessments. In the comments of Anneli and Siri, they reflected on their experience and concluded that they could have done more to change the situation and actually make the MGW better, rather than blaming someone else for a poor mark.

Wei, a Chinese participant, provided insights regarding how the exact course marks only affect some of the students because they are from countries or wish to work in those countries where future employers have an expectation of high marks. On the contrary, in some other countries, such as in China, employers would only require a pass degree from future employees. Thus, the comparison sheds light on the different standards students might want to achieve in assignments. This seems important for understanding conflict in MGW, as caused by a 20% difference on the course marks students aim for. This finding about students' perspectives on group assessment could inform future research on how MGW is designed and how it is assessed, in light of updating the criteria for group assessment to incorporate more elements of reflection so as to promote collaborative learning.

### **5.3.7 Language proficiency**

Before I discuss whether language proficiency is a factor hindering the progress of MGW, or how it hinders the progress, I will present some data showing how students perceived the role of English in MGW.

Many of the international students who responded to the questionnaire reported in the open comments that they enjoyed the great opportunities to practise and improve using English when working in multicultural groups:

#### Example 3.7a

Q3080.1: "It will be interesting and helpful for my English language studying"

#### Example 3.7b

Q1149: “I am here in the UK. So I want to make the full use of every opportunity to learn and to speak English. So I am kind of looking forward to mixed-culture group-work. I really enjoy it!...”.

#### Example 3.7c

Q1008: “Throughout my MA work, I have improved my ability to communicate and interact more actively with mixed-culture groups and especially with English-native speaker Colleagues”.

The above participants considered MGW as “interesting and helpful” (Example 3.7a) opportunities, where they could “learn and speak” in English (Example 3.7b), and which provided an opportunity to improve their ability to “communicate and interact more actively” (Example 3.7c). Their comments suggest that they had little experience or opportunity to learn through MGW and to speak English prior to their courses in this university.

Other participants reported their confidence about working in groups improved alongside their English ability:

#### Example 3.7d

Q3005.1: “It was difficult in starting but I am enjoying it now. I faced some problems in start because of English but gradually I am feeling confident”

#### Example 3.7e

Q3067: “I am not sure about any changes but I think my English has been improved and I have gained some experiences working in groups and I am more confident in a group especially regarding the technical issues”.

#### Example 3.7f

Q3091: “Firstly, I am afraid I would be silent because of my language disadvantage, but [if] my group mates are very helpful and kind, then I notice I can air my voice more.”

Both the contributors in Example 3.7d and Example 3.7e link confidence to improved English. In Example 3.7f, the participant specifically acknowledges a “language disadvantage” but also the effect of increasing her confidence to “air my voice” that was thanks to “helpful and kind” group members.

International students’ improvement in English speaking was also noticeable to native English speakers, as mentioned in Example 3.7g and Example 3.7h:



#### Example 3.7g

Q3045: "... the quality of English speaking displayed by the non-native English speakers has also improved over this time at university."

#### Example 3.7h

Q3059.2: "... I have found that some international students' English has improved greatly since the beginning of the year."

Some native English speakers also showed their understanding of the fact that English is not the most comfortable language for some international students to communicate in:

#### Example 3.7i

Q3055: "I have a lot more respect for students of other cultures in terms of the difficulties they face both with using a second language and understanding some of the concepts in the course."

#### Example 3.7j

Q1164: "I have gained an appreciation for how difficult it must be to undertake a Masters course for international students who are non-native English speakers and I hope that I am more accommodating and helpful to group members because of some of the difficulties they face."

#### Example 3.7k

I09.1: "...But as soon as you start working together it gets more comfortable and they become more confident in their English speaking abilities and share their opinions more"

In Example 3.7i and Example 3.7j, students talked about gaining "respect" for the difficulties of using a second language and appreciation for how difficult it must be. Another student observed that the process of working together made it "more comfortable" and so increased confidence in people's English skills (Example 3.7k).

Even though many of the native English speakers showed their understanding and support towards international students, some of them also expressed negative attitudes towards working in multicultural groups with international students whose English was not good enough for smooth communication.

#### Example 3.7l

Q3077.1: "I was excited at first, but a lot more work falls into my lap because English is my first language. I find myself writing or rewriting the entire assignment, and that other students use the excuse that since English is not their first language their writing isn't the best. Which I understand, but then they need to work on it and be comfortable doing writing assignments before starting a postgraduate degree at an English university..."

### Example 3.7m

Q3059.1: “My attitude has changed to liking group work less as some group members’ English was not good enough to enable them to contribute fully to the task. Although it is a good opportunity for them to improve their English, as a British student, I do not benefit in the same way.”

Some of the native speakers became frustrated when they had to put in more effort, and/or complete a larger proportion of the work because of a gap in language skills, one saying “a lot more work falls into my lap because English is my first language” (Example 3.7l). They also did not consider MGW an appropriate place for international students to develop English skills they should have worked on to an adequate level before starting a postgraduate degree. Although it was “a good opportunity for them to improve their English”, as one British student pointed out, “I do not benefit in the same way” (Example 3.7m).

### Example 3.7n

Q1010: “I strongly believe that working in this environment has a negative effect on my grade. If a student wishes to study in a different language to their first, they should have bilingual or professional proficiency end of story. The language and culture gap is a huge issue. For me personally this is due to the fact that I am the only native on my course ... I am here to get a masters degree not teach people English. The people on my course are all lovely and I get on with them well but when it has an effect on my learning it is frustrating.”

However, as the participant points out, there was only one native speaker on the course. Whichever group this student was in, they would therefore be working with L2 students. In spite of the fact that this participant believed that the “language and culture gap is a huge issue”, it has to be taken into consideration that the group members they collaborated with may have been struggling with difficulties other than simply language and including not knowing how to disagree openly with others in a discussion. Culturally different ways of communicating and working could be mistaken as a language proficiency issue – something that will be explored in sections 5.3.7 and 5.3.8.

### Example 3.7o

Q3077.2: “... I still strongly believe that if you do not feel very confident in your English, written and spoken, you probably should not be attending an English university, or you should take more strides to improving your English while here. I often hear, ‘it’s so easy for you because you speak English!’ Well it’s easy for me because I chose to come to an English speaking school; had I gone to Spain, I would be struggling significantly, but I would not go there unless I felt fluent in Spanish.”

Like the student quoted in Example 3.7m, the student quoted in Example 3.7n emphasised the “negative effect on my grade” of working with students studying in

a second language. They also expressed how frustrating it was to be put in a situation where “bilingual or professional proficiency” in English was not considered as a common requirement. Both this student and the one quoted in Example 3.7o felt that attending an English university should mean having an appropriate level of English ability. When their own English language ability was perceived by others as a privilege that they held, “it’s so easy for you because you speak English!” (Example 3.7o), they were made to feel that they somehow owed it to others to contribute more because of this advantage.

This frustration was not exclusive to native English speakers. It was also pointed out by international students who considered themselves to have a higher level of English proficiency:

Example 3.7p

101 [Heidi]: “..Because I think non-native speakers should speak English well enough that they can communicate in a group. Along the way, I get frustrated, not only in group work but also in the course, in doing smaller group works/round tables in class or speaking in class, people that don’t speak English or understand it enough to be part of a quick conversation and you know, academically very challenging conversation. I think that’s frustrating ... the longer I studied, the more I probably felt that why it is that people don’t have these necessary skills to, like these high level English speaking skills and that’s then probably why I felt that I don’t think group work is a space where you should be practicing your English skills because I think you should already have...it should be about communicating, it should be about coming up with creative ideas, helping each other etc, so English language skills shouldn’t really play that much of a role....”

As pointed out by Heidi (Example 3.7p), whether MGW should be a space for English language practice was perceived very differently by students who had a higher level of proficiency in English and those with a lower level. The benefits of MGW that have been discussed previously in this chapter, such as learning from the different perspectives from group members, would be largely reduced if the language skills required for having a constructive discussion were a problem.

The complaints and frustration voiced by these students were not purely because they had issues with people who have less efficient communication skills. Rather, their goal, or their ideal MGW, should be more focused on the content and knowledge exchange, and importantly, when the MGW task carried a significant weight in their final marks, the demand on peers’ contribution would be likely to rise with the percentage of grade the MGW was worth. As this participant explains, the mark as an outcome of MGW takes priority over the benefits gained during the learning process, such as language skills improvement.

### Example 3.7q

Q1100: “It is a good opportunity for me to improve my communication skills and how to express my idea in English effectively. However, as group work usually has a dominant goal (especially when it will be assessed) more important than the communication improvement and idea generation and organization, it usually draw my attention to the friction and the lack of efficiency during our communication due to various logics and language skills”

In Example 3.7q, the participant highlights the link between language skills with efficiency during communication. This student on the one hand acknowledges the potential of MGW to help with “communication improvement and idea generation”, and on the other hand is convinced that the dominant goal of assessed MGW is not that. It is worth asking the question: What is perceived by participants to be the dominant goal of assessed MGW? The literature on MGW frequently suggests that communication skills development is one of the key reasons to promote MGW in HE; however, many of the participants in the current study did not consider it to be a priority.

### Example 3.7r

Q1031: “I would say I would prefer to work with native English speakers for communication reasons as I have had a few bad experiences with international students but have also had many good ones so all in all I don’t mind too much as long as they speak good English and it is not an effort to communicate.”

Despite the “many good [experiences]” that another participant had with international students, the “few bad experiences” were enough to drive a preference for working with native English speakers (Example 3.7r).

Students expressed their frustration about English skills in different ways:

### Example 3.7s

I06.1 [Ivanka]: “I had no idea it would be hard to communicate in English, since we are in UK, so supposedly everyone's English should be enough to communicate basic ideas and course-related ideas. Now I think tutors should allow students to choose their own groups, especially if it is assessed work.”

Another student I interviewed, Ivanka, was surprised because “this is UK, so supposedly everyone's English should be enough to communicate basic ideas and course-related ideas” (Example 3.7s). The frustration students feel may result in trying to choose their own groups to work with people with better English, instead of choosing people with different perspectives or skills sets. English can become the main criterion of evaluating group members’ ability.

Chinese students themselves also voiced their struggle over not being able to express their ideas in English, as mirrored in the other students' complaints.

#### Example 3.7t

Researcher: "what was the most challenging part for you to work in multicultural groups?"

I15 [Wei]: I have to say things in English. That's the most annoying part, it's always circling around without getting to the point. It's possible to make a point in mandarin in one or two sentences, but now you have to say it in English."

#### Example 3.7u

I16 [Xiaomi]: "I was struggling a lot with language. Because in the beginning I could not understand the accents, I did not know how to express myself. I am already feeling shy to say anything, so I could not get in."

In fact, Wei considers Mandarin, in which "it's possible to make a point ... in one or two sentences" as more efficient than English (Example 3.7t), and Xiaomi mentions difficulty in understanding what is being said in English due to unfamiliar accents (Example 3.7u). While Wei and Xiaomi reported experiencing some difficulties when speaking English in group discussion, Chuju disagreed with the accusation that Chinese students' English was not good enough:

#### Example 3.7v

I13 [Chuju]: "...[non-Chinese students] are like if they know something, they will say it out loud, but if we [Chinese students] know something, we don't necessarily do that... One time after our discussion, an Iranian boy said: 'I know my Chinese classmates are smart, but they don't seem to get it, maybe it's a language problem'. Then I said to him: 'you should not blame everything on it, maybe it just people are different [in communicating]'. ... But what made me sadder was when he was criticising Chinese people, none of his Chinese group members stood up to say to him 'here is what I think...and we don't need someone like you', or just tell him that 'maybe we didn't understand, but you didn't ask us to join the conversation, or notice how we feel'..."

Researcher: Do you think it was a language issue?

I13 [Chuju]: "I don't think so...there are 26 people on the course, 8 Chinese students and 1 from Hong Kong, so it's 9 of us... Our English is quite good and we don't have particular issues, some of us even did our undergraduate degrees in the UK...no it's definitely not pure English problems..."

Chuju firstly noticed that some of her non-Chinese classmates would say everything out loud in group discussion, while her Chinese classmates did not do that. She used "we" to refer to all the Chinese students on her course, as if this was a shared pattern of behaviour. When she heard someone else question the English ability of her Chinese peers, she felt the need to defend them. She expressed frustration about her peers' behaviour in not defending themselves or fighting back, which made her "sadder" than hearing her Chinese peers being criticised. This frustration could

come from the fact that she believed “it’s definitely not pure English problems”; but that the people involved who had the opportunity to clarify the misunderstanding chose not to come forward to explain the situation, and this led to the whole group of “Chinese classmates” of which Chuju was a member being questioned about their English ability.

In this section, the first part highlighted how international students perceive MGW as helpful for developing English speaking skills. This was confirmed by the native speaker participants who reported observing an improvement in their classmates’ English and their growing confidence in communicating in group discussions over time. In the second part of this section, evidence was presented in respect of participants’ beliefs about whether MGW should be a place for people to practise English or not. Additionally, while MGW was seen as helping students develop their communication skills, it was not perceived as a priority by the participants, implying the need for lecturers to emphasise its advantages. The reports of the students shown here also suggest that what is being used to assess MGW and to measure the success of group interaction should be carefully reviewed in future research to help mediate this disagreement over whether MGW should be considered as a platform to practise English or whether students should have a higher level of English proficiency before engaging in MGW discussion. Some participants already touched upon the difference between communication style and level of English proficiency, something that will be further explored in the next section.

#### **5.3.8 Different communication styles**

Quietness or silence in a discussion was perceived as one of the greatest challenges in MGW. This reflects the findings of Turner (2009).

This participant was frustrated by the silence of group members during discussion and also complained that even with a fair amount of attempts, they still could not expect more participation from coursemates.

### Example 3.8a

Q3038.2: “In general I don’t like group work because you always face difficulties because some people work more than others. But especially here with Asian course mates it was difficult because most of them never expressed their thoughts during the meetings even after you asked them individually and stayed quiet for the whole time”

However, silence, or using few words and non-verbal communication to express oneself, would be considered by traditional Confucians as a valuable demonstration of wisdom, and an illustration of respect for others’ time and knowledge (Gudykunst, 2004). So as the student pointed out in Example 3.8a, the struggle was mostly with Asian coursemates who were more likely to be from a Confucian heritage culture, where they might just be used to using silence in a different way.

In the same way as silence in discussion can be perceived differently by students from different cultures, so can assertiveness. Ivanka, who came from eastern Europe, was already quoted explaining that being able to debate different ideas very openly and directly with her team members was how she had done GW in her home country. She also commented on the likely impact of a very direct style of arguing:

### Example 3.8b

I06 [Ivanka]: “... if you're aggressive, if you're assertive in the way you're talking, some cultures shut down whereas others respond with the same thing and that’s when consensus happens”.

The assertive approach did not function well when she worked in mixed groups in the UK, because “some cultures shut down” (Example 3.8b). With others, however, the assertiveness of the speaker might encourage them to “respond with the same thing” which Ivanka links positively to consensus as a good outcome.

A perspective provided by a Chinese participant reveals an interesting insight about how she positioned herself in a multicultural group, and why:

### Example 3.8c

Q3086.1: “I usually do the coordination work in my group as Chinese culture train me tend not to be aggressive during the group work.”

This student’s reference to her “Chinese culture” as a kind of training (Example 3.8c) that makes her take a role in group work that does not involve being “aggressive” is supported by the literature on Chinese communication placing more emphasis on non-verbal aspects and implicitness (Wang, 2012). When working in groups, the majority of students expect each other to exchange ideas, to talk about

every idea they have, being explicit about problems or situations, and sometimes talk in a loud voice to debate and ask repeating questions to clarify ideas. All of these above “appropriate” or acceptable behaviours in MGW would be perceived as bad manners and a lack of respect in Confucian heritage cultures (Valiente, 2008).

Wei gave an explanation of why he would prefer to keep silent in the discussion in Example 3.8d.

#### Example 3.8d

I15 [Wei]: “I usually wait to see if the situation is good enough, sometimes I do contribute, because I think I have a better idea. When I say it out loud, then I don’t like to be challenged.

Researcher: why don’t you say it in the first place?

I15 [Wei]: Like I said before, I wish I were a ‘fire fighter’. I am not used to throwing out my ideas in the beginning...that is too high key.... that’s not good.

He pointed out that providing his ideas in the beginning would attract too much attention, and he should only start to suggest ideas when others could not come up with ones that he thought were good enough. He also would prefer not to be challenged once he started talking.

This approach on the one hand seemed to be associated with his previous experience of leading student groups, however, some other Chinese students also had a similar approach in discussion.

#### Example 3.8e

I17 [Chuju]: “...I prefer to speak only when I have something interesting to say. It is like people get on Facebook all the time, but also think it is boring to post photos all the time... so if I want to attract attention, I would only post things that are special, like group photos of special event of the day...so I start to think if I could not get a chance to speak up in the group work discussion, I should come up with a really special or convincing idea, then raise my hand, so that they would think what I said is very special, then later they will get use to ask me about my ideas”.

In Example 3.8e, Chuju on the one hand mentioned she could not always get a chance to speak up in the discussion, on the other hand she decided to adjust how her group members would perceive her by only speaking when there is something special to say. This “only speak when the idea is good” approach seemed to help her in establishing a reputation for good ideas, to win herself a voice in the group discussion.



This struggle of getting a voice in the discussion was not Chuju's individual problem. Xiaomi also expressed her struggle as well, even when she thought she was helping the group by correcting them, as in Example 3.8f:

Example 3.8f

I16 [Xiaomi] : “Then I end up forcing myself to go home to do more reading, so at least the second day if they were wrong I can correct them, so I end up only learning how to complain.

Researcher: So you are saying because you did your reading, so you could see the problems in their discussion?

I16 [Xiaomi]: Yes. If someone does not listen to me, I will look for the ones who are willing to listen as well as have influence in the group. If he or she thinks I am right, then the situation gets better.

From the comments from Xiaomi above, she explained how she had to reply on some other group member's influence on the team, in order to maintain her standing, as not everybody would listen when she spoke.

Some native speakers realised that the different pace of speaking and conversation flow would be especially challenging for international students to keep up if their English proficiency was not good enough to cope with a fast exchange of ideas. One who managed to realise the difference had learnt to slow down for international students:

Example 3.8g

Q3056: “... The non native speakers, who while it's hard for all, every one benefits, I learn to speak slower and be more considerate and they get to practice as well. We all benefit”.

Another pointed out that while “it's hard for all” (Example 3.8g) to slow down and listen to others, giving space and time in a conversation that allows others to articulate their ideas is important for including non-native speakers in the discussion.

### Example 3.8h

I05 [Jaime]: “Yeah, like I haven't had any issues where things were just like so hard I couldn't understand, if I just like slowed down, like listened to someone. I think some people get frustrated because they're used to speaking in a certain conversation flow. They're used to speaking quickly. I think especially Americans, it's very direct, like exchange your idea, okay, next. And it's not always the case, but I mean if someone took a little bit longer to articulate something, or if they weren't doing it in a way that was conventional, I could see how people would get frustrated. But I wouldn't say that people couldn't function properly. I've never met anyone in our course that couldn't articulate themselves or accomplish what they needed to with their mastery of English”.

She shared her perception of the situation from both sides. While she could “see how people would get frustrated” if a non-native speaker “took a little bit longer to articulate something” (Example 3.8h), she also emphasised that in her experience there were no students on her own course that “couldn't ... accomplish what they needed to” in English.

International students also voiced their frustration at trying to keep up with high-speed conversation in English:

### Example 3.8i

Q1107: “... The honest truth is group work can be a really cut throat environment and may result people feeling ostracised by other group members who are not willing to slow down for them.”

In Example 3.8i, the student observes that in some cases, the speed of talk is intimidating (“a really cut-throat environment”) and can lead to perceived isolation - “feeling ostracized” - by the rest of the group.

When students from different disciplinary backgrounds are engaging in MGW, differences in their knowledge also make it more difficult for students to communicate effectively (Popov et al., 2012).

### Example 3.8j

I03 [Leo]: “... even though we have same background, we can have different kind of perspective like I've been here almost a year and right now they understand how I talk, how I communicate so it's easier for them to understand but my friend from the same country as me, if he use English, we end up in a different understanding because our language is slightly changed based on our class, but if I use my own language, it's fine but if we try to discuss something in English, somehow we end up a bit ... we completely have different perspectives about English, he's from supply chain and I'm from surface management, it's a different world and we have a different understanding of the terms and meaning, so I have to explain in Indonesian to that person.”

As Leo pointed out (Example 3.8j), when talking in English to people from the same home country, such as his co-national friend who was studying in a different

subject area, difficulties in understanding each other tended to be more because they might use different sets of vocabulary when they were conversing, which could be built around the subjects they studied. In that situation, he would “have to explain in Indonesian”.

In this part, many different communication styles were documented by participants: different usage of silence in a conversation; degree of directness and assertiveness used to convince other people; strategies used to get a turn to speak in a group discussion; speed and flow of conversation; the loss of meaning in translation when people are communicating in a second language. When working in groups, the influence of these subtle components of interactions are not evident to everyone. Even when students start to pay attention to them, adjustments can require skills that take time to develop and which require practice. For example, for the students who are used to being extremely assertive and direct, how much less direct should they be in order that other group members feel less overpowered? For students who are not used to several seconds of silence in a conversation, at what point should they take their turn without being perceived as bluntly interrupting their interlocutor? Some form of support in helping students understand and deal with such issues would have facilitated a better MGW environment.

### **5.3.9 Different working styles**

Culturally different decision-making styles, problem-solving styles and different ways of complying with the MGW instructions and requirements has been reported in previous research as difficulties hindering the students’ MGW progress (Popov et al., 2012). Participants in this study also pointed out the negative impact of different working styles:

#### Example 3.9a

Q3038.1: “It is quite difficult because people from different countries have different working styles.”

#### Example 3.9b

Q3118.1: “Sometimes communicating can be very challenging and people from different cultures have different attitudes and working style”

In Example 3.9a and Example 3.9b, the participants refer to these differences as “quite difficult” and “very challenging”. Different styles of working, for example people who start early and are prepared compared with people who start late and are last-minute, would be likely to cause a clash in the MGW process, where they were expected to work on the task at a similar timescale and speed. Siri shared her frustration with group members who like to start work later:

#### Example 3.9c

I04 [Siri]: “... we had a problem with different levels of commitment and some people were, well I know that they were “It’ll be fine, I’ll do it next week”. And, I’m a bit, I’m not too much of a last-minute person, so I tended to start panicking a little bit, and because I couldn’t really discuss the group work with them. And, whenever I tried they were like “er...”, which made me realise: Ok, so maybe I will get more out of talking to the people that were more committed...”

She described herself as “not too much of a last-minute person” and might therefore “start panicking a little bit” when others tried to reassure her that they would do it next week (Example 3.9c).

Participants also pointed out there were different levels of directness in the conversation and different approaches of working and discussing:

#### Example 3.9d

Q3029: “...Some people are blunt, some are polite and some prefer to work than talk; It is so amazing to see so many different working styles...”

#### Example 3.9e

I06 [Ivanka]: “... it’s the amount of attention you give to the detail, it’s the amount of time you plan to spend on work, it’s also in a group, if you’re used to speaking out loud and expressing your opinion, as people being like ‘I’m not going to say anything, I’m not going to express myself’.”

In Example 3.9d, the participant comments on the “amazing” diversity of working styles, including “blunt”, “polite”, and preferring to “work rather than talk”. Ivanka in Example 3.9e lists various differences in attitudes towards working, attention to detail and different approaches of communicating with group members. She also commented on culturally different expectations of group member relationships and dynamics:

### Example 3.9f

I06 [Ivanka]: "...how you treat your peers and how you, you know in some cultures, there is the whole, there is a more pronounced leader thing and then in some cultures you're more going towards let's all try to be as equal as we can, so there is that, so some people in the group might choose a leader and look up to that person whereas others might try to be equal and that will kind of disbalance the whole thing..."

She described the tension between people who have more hierarchical values, "in some cultures there is a more pronounced leader thing", and people who have more egalitarian values, "let's all try to be as equal as we can", as something that will "disbalance" multicultural group work (Example 3.9f). In Example 3.9g, she elaborated on the disbalance, or the impact of students bringing their own expectations about leadership style into working with students from different cultures:

### Example 3.9g

I06 [Ivanka]: "...because the leader in that case, regardless of which culture he or she comes from, he or she will be in a very difficult position, whether you lead or you work with, you can't do both at the same time to be honest, you're tyrannical basically, which is completely acceptable in some cultures, which is what people sometimes expect of a person who's taking the leadership will tell them what to do, whereas from other cultures, everybody tries to be like "yeah, but" and that creates a difficulty.."

In particular, she highlights what "a very difficult position" any leader would be in trying to manage these different expectations of leadership style, as would the other team members (Example 3.9g). She describes the more hierarchical preference as expecting to be told what to do, and the more egalitarian preference as all the group members feeling they can challenge being told what to do.

The data presented in this section show that students came across different working styles through MGW; for example, while some people prefer to finish the work as early as they possibly can, others prefer to complete it at the last minute. Noticing such differences indicates that working in groups develops students' observation skills. Moreover, learning how to manage and accommodate to them so that they work more effectively with others is a secondary level skill that requires practice and collaboration. It is possible that students found the different working styles of their peers to hinder MGW progress because they had not sufficiently developed the skills needed to manage and accommodate difference.

### 5.3.10 Negative stereotypes

As discussed above, there were various factors that affected participants' MGW experience negatively, and some of them encountered a lot of difficulties and challenges. Some of the unpleasant experiences had resulted in students developing negative attitudes towards MGW as well as forming negative stereotypes about students of other nationalities.

Ivanka shared her frustration of working with group members that had a record of being late for meetings and low proficiency in English. When they went to an important workplace meeting with a prestigious media company based in London, some of her group members got lost in the area and were late for the meeting.

#### Example 3.10a

I06 [Ivanka]: "...if it's work and a meeting, like that meeting [a workplace meeting with a real media organisation], I got so pissed when they were late because that was the first meeting with [media organisation] and your first impression is you're 20 minutes late and because of the language barrier, they couldn't even explain why they were late.

In addition, her group members "couldn't even explain why" they were late for the meeting, which Ivanka attributed to "the language barrier" (Example 3.10a). She was particularly angry with them over this meeting incident, because she valued this opportunity to work with this organisation and really wanted to do a good project to impress them. She also mentioned in our interview that the team was representing the university, department and her supervisor's reputation was also riding on it. As a result, she formed very negative attitudes towards the Chinese students on her course after this group project:

### Example 3.10b

Researcher: They can't express their ideas properly?

I06 [Ivanka]: "Not properly, they can't express their ideas at all. People don't get it, everybody knows there are language barriers, but in our centre, in my class, there are people who are incapable of saying "she's lost around this place", "she's lost", they're incapable of saying, "she's lost" and like obviously what they do revert to is, they turn to their peers and they start speaking Chinese and then you're just standing there waiting for them to figure out how to say it, as a group! I feel like it makes me look like a huge bad person when I keep complaining about the language barrier thing but honestly, people do not realise to what extent it is. I've seen people from other courses who make mistakes, who take time but they are still able to express themselves. In this case, it's not mistakes, it's not that they take time, it's just that they don't know it."

Speaking Chinese among themselves was a particular issue that convinced Ivanka that her group members were either completely incompetent or not motivated enough to improve their language skills (Example 3.10b). However, she compared her Chinese groupmates' apparent inability to express themselves "at all" with the ability of Chinese students on other courses to express themselves despite making mistakes and taking time.

Similar frustrations of working with groups of Chinese students or students from other Asian countries were also reported by other students:

### Example 3.10c

Q1017: "If you work together in a group with Chinese people, they always just speak chinese, even if the group consists of group members from different countries."

### Example 3.10d

Q3084: "I realised that group-mates have divided into two parts: 1. students from China who tend to speak Chinese even during group discussions 2. non-Chinese students. As a result I felt more comfortable to be in a mixed-group rather than being alone with Chinese group-mates as sometimes they started talking Chinese, which I do not understand."

### Example 3.10e

Q3117: "I think group work is ridiculous to start with, and mix culture one doesn't change anything. Only problem would be if there are many Chinese or Indians in the same group they tend to stay between them and not even try to communicate."

### Example 3.10f

Q3038.2: "Here with Asian course mates it was difficult because most of them never expressed their thoughts during the meetings even after you asked them individually and stayed quiet for the whole time."

### Example 3.10g

Q1023: “I personally found that in my specific group I could not learn many new useful things. I am not racist at all, but I found that for Occidental guys it's very difficult to work with Chinese people.”

In Example 3.10c and Example 3.10d participants complain about Chinese students always just speaking Chinese, and speaking Chinese during group discussions. In Example 3.10e, the problem concerns groups with a high proportion of either Chinese or Indian students because they “don’t even try” to communicate except with their co-nationals. In Example 3.10f, the problem mentioned is Asian coursemates being quiet and not expressing their thoughts during meetings “even when you ask them individually”. In Example 3.10g, the participant observes that working with Chinese people is “very difficult” because of his own cultural identity as an “Occidental guy”.

Comparing the above complaints made about Chinese students (Example 3.10c, Example 3.10d, Example 3.10e and Example 3.10g) with Example 3.7v (discussed in 5.3.7 from the perspective of language proficiency issues, where Chuju shared her experience of feeling frustrated by her Chinese peers for not defending themselves when they were questioned about their English ability), it is worth asking why the Chinese students did not feel it necessary to explain themselves to their coursemates. To what extent the negative impression that other students had formed of Chinese students was the result of real problems rather than misunderstandings is unclear. How aware are Chinese students of how others perceive them? One possible explanation for this might have been that a small portion of Chinese students were more concerned with passing their degrees rather than achieving higher marks – something captured in Examples 3.6j and 3.6k in section 5.3.6. For Chinese students who come to the UK for a PGT course, they may typically arrive in the UK in October and plan to go back to China in the next year around July to complete their final dissertation at home, as most of the taught modules are likely to finish around June or July in the UK. This leaves them about eight or nine months living in Europe, and they are likely to spend a significant amount of time travelling to as many European countries as they can.

The final three examples in this section reflect the opinions of students who seemed to understand the differences in communication and working styles, and chose to



use nationality to label these different behaviours, especially behaviours they seem to disagree with:

#### Example 3.10h

Q1148: “for different cultures people, the strategy for discussion should vary. If there are Indian, they are unwilling to accept others’ opinions, sometimes European cannot write well. I do not like talking too much in group...”

#### Example 3.10i

I03 [Leo]: “... I have difficulties working with Indians, I have to say that, yeah. They speak a lot. But it’s hard for me to understand the idea. So I don’t know what they are talking about, they use English, they use their accent ... they talk really loud, they talk all day, it’s like they have a lot of ideas but when I confronted with facts, with data, they’re like “mmmm”, so it’s kind of people like I have difficulties to work with...I think this is my personal opinion about Indian culture, if you’re in India and you don’t speak loud, everyone will crush you”.

#### Example 3.10j

I02 [Anneli]: “In the end, I think of all the group works I looked at, perhaps the Latin countries in general were the ones that I felt, for this sort of work, were a bit heavy to work with. Because of their a bit loose approach to the task and very floating timelines and stuff, and I actually developed a liking for more exacting”.

The participant quoted in Example 3.10h attributes unwillingness to accept others’ opinions to Indian students, and mentions their own preference not to talk “too much” in a group. In Example 3.10i, Leo attributes difficulties in working with Indians to their accent, how loud and how much they talk, and explains this by saying that “if you’re in India and you don’t speak loud, everyone will crush you”. In Example 3.10j, Anneli attributes difficulties in working with students from Latin countries to their “loose approach to the task and very floating timelines”.

MGW is seen as a tool for helping students to become more aware of cultural difference and to challenge cultural stereotypes by having actual interactions with people from different countries (De Vita, 2000). However, some participants in this research seem to have formed more cultural stereotypes – mostly negative stereotypes – as a result of working in multicultural groups. Consequently, participants who formed negative stereotypes of other cultural groups had come to believe that cultural difference was a factor hindering MGW progress.

### **5.3.11 Section conclusion**

Section 5.3 has reported what the participants perceived as challenges in MGW. A detailed account of what exactly were considered conflicts and what they think

caused the conflicts was presented with supporting data. The participants also shared their different understandings of what is consensus and why it was difficult to reach consensus in their groups. Many students also shared their insights on the issues around whether it was fair to be assessed as a whole group based on the outcomes they delivered as a group. Language proficiency, especially the ability to participate in challenging group discussion was also reported as a reason for many students to think more negatively about MGW, even when they acknowledge the fact MGW could have been helpful in improving students' language proficiency. Different communication styles also caused misunderstandings among students and very often were mistaken as a language proficiency issue. Different working styles also made MGW more difficult to manage. Since group members found it difficult to deal with these, many negative cultural stereotypes ended up being created during the work often due to the difficult MGW experiences the participants had.

One educational benefit of MGW is that students learn through interacting with people who are different from themselves. However, this should not mean that students are simply left on their own to survive the challenges that arise in this process. The lecturers, academic departments and the institution were not reported by the participants in the present study regarding actively facilitating the MGW process and supporting the students through the challenges they encountered, which could mean that the support has not been made available to every student. In a time when HEIs are rolling out their internationalisation agendas and claim to be providing all students with a global education and preparing them to be global citizens, more should be invested in supporting students' academic learning in a multicultural environment and increasing the opportunities for positive learning experiences.

Following this discussion of challenges of MGW reported by the participants, section 5.4 will present the actions the participants took to cope with these challenges.

## 5.4 Coping strategies for facing difficulties

The previous section on the challenges students encountered in MGW discussed the situations students reported as difficult, the possible reasons that caused the difficulties and why they were perceived as challenging and hindering the progress of MGW. Although the challenges and issues that arise in MGW have been widely in the literature (Turner, 2009; Kimmel & Volet, 2010, 2012; Strauss et al., 2011; Popov et al., 2012), whether and how students managed to overcome those challenges remains under-explored.

In order to understand what could foster a better intercultural learning environment, the participants in this study were asked to share their experiences and strategies regarding how to deal with the difficulties they encountered in MGW. Many questionnaire respondents reflected on their MGW experience and commented on how they resolved the issues when they answered the open-ended questions. In the interviews, participants also responded to the question “What did you do when facing difficulties?” The questionnaire and interview data were coded into the following themes: paying more attention during interaction, creating basic rules for working together, adjusting their own communication strategies, addressing issues explicitly, using cultural stereotypes to facilitate the MGW process, and “being a bigger person”. These themes represented the strategies students employed in their group interaction for better working together and will be discussed in more detail below.

### 5.4.1 Paying more attention during interaction

Many participants reported on the importance of expressing their uncertainty when they encountered difficult situations in MGW, as well as paying attention to other group members during the process of working together.

#### Example 4.1a

Q3107: “The most important is to take the time to listen [to] everybody making their point and to really understand them and not to be afraid to ask peers to repeat if it is unclear.”

#### Example 4.1b

I04.2 [Siri]: “...I learned to listen better and to ask my peers more often about what they think.”

#### Example 4.1c

I09 [Katie]: “I think you just have to learn how different people operate and sometimes you need to know when to stand your ground, when to just concede and be okay fine, I’ll cooperate.”

In Example 4.1a, not being afraid to ask peers for clarification is mentioned along with taking the time to listen better, and in Example 4.1b, asking peers “more often about what they think” is mentioned by Siri. In Example 4.1c, Katie emphasises the importance of learning “how different people operate”, “when to stand your ground [and] when to just concede”. It can be seen from the examples above that participants realised that successful communication requires effort regarding both talking and listening. ‘Learning how different people operate’ would include work on active listening and observation, and ‘know when to stand your ground’ would require work on understanding the whole disagreement and how the other side thinks, and later explaining it in a way that the other side could actually understand. This is not only about the speaking up, but also when and how to speak up so the message is correctly received by others. As the participants suggest, listening more to what others say and speaking up at appropriate moments when differing opinions arise would help reduce the difficulties in communication and can only be achieved by group members who pay more attention during the interaction.

### **5.4.2 Creating basic rules for working together**

A number of students highlighted the importance of having rules for working together.

#### Example 4.2a

Q3127: “The most important thing I can say now is making consensus or ground rule before the group work. Basic rule can be ‘don’t be selfish’, ‘try to keep fair’ and ‘compromise [with] each other when we have problems because we are different’.”

Not being selfish, maintaining a level of fairness and compromising when necessary are basic criteria suggested by the participant in Example 4.2a when it comes to setting up ground rules. The following examples will showcase what particular rules the participants employed or considered that made MGW easier.

#### Example 4.2b

I09 [Katie]: “I think definitely sticking to deadlines, if they say do this by Wednesday, just do it by Wednesday because if everybody else has done their part and you haven’t done your part, it’s quite unfair on everyone else. We all have to make sure that when we’re setting deadlines, even for within the group and for everyone, that they were attainable and not unrealistic. ... so you have to speak your mind as well when it comes to those kinds of things, such that even they know what to expect from you personally.”

Katie highlighted that not sticking to your own deadlines “is quite unfair on everyone else” but that all deadlines should be “attainable and not unrealistic” for each individual’s needs in terms of workload and time pressure (Example 4.2b). She also emphasised the importance of communicating to others “what to expect from you personally”. A useful strategy for avoiding misunderstandings like “someone is not contributing” might be for group members to co-ordinate a timeline for tasks they are assigned.

Ivanka described an idea put forward by her group members so that the whole assignment would have a coherent group style:

#### Example 4.2c

I06 [Ivanka]: “... basically one of us should upload a final version of what we’re expecting so we can all adhere to that template... that’s a good idea in terms of coordinating the work, so you can make sure that at least you follow the same formula, so when you’re assembling it, it’s the same thing as making a presentation, one person makes the presentation because if everybody makes their own slides, they would be very different ...”

Her groupmates suggested setting up a template for the assignment, which she described as “a good idea in terms of co-ordinating the work” (Example 4.2c) because if each group member were to make their own slides they might end up using very different fonts and styles that would disrupt the consistency of the presentation. She considered this idea very useful, because even though each subsection would be completed by different individuals everybody would be using the same formula. This way of working would be helpful to avoid spending time at the end working to make the different contributions of group members look consistent. It also provides a visual presentation for group members to see the kind of product they expect each other to deliver, which could reduce the misunderstanding caused by different standards.

In Leo’s groups, many of his group members were very quiet during group discussion. He was not sure whether they did not understand the conversation or

they just did not want to participate. So Leo suggested to the group members that whoever spoke least in the discussion, should do the final presentation in class:

#### Example 4.2d

I03 [Leo]: "...it's a threat, 'If you stay silent, you'll do the presentation, the final presentation'."

Researcher: So you tell them 'so anybody is keeping silent, you're going to do the presentation'?

I03 [Leo]: "Yes. And then suddenly they speak a lot, they talk a lot, good, now I will not have to do the presentation!"

He did this in order to motivate the quieter members of the group to actively participate in the discussion, rather than face the "threat" of doing the final presentation. According to Leo this strategy was very successful because "suddenly they speak a lot" (Example 4.2d). This can be very effective in helping people judge a situation where they are not sure if some group members choose not to speak or they are struggling with the discussion. If a group member is very silent after a ground rule like such as this has been established, that person might genuinely need some help in keeping up with the rest of the group, and this silence could be a clue for other group members to mediate this situation.

Leo explained that about half of his course mates are from China, so whichever group he works in, Chinese students occupy at least half of the group, many of whom prefer to speak Mandarin with each other, even in group discussions. It made other non-Chinese group members including himself feel frustrated. When he was assigned to a new group, faced with Chinese group members who had a tendency to speak Mandarin within the group, Leo decided to establish a ground rule with them by making a joke:

#### Example 4.2e

I03 [Leo]: "... I said this at the beginning of the class, 'Guys, I don't speak Mandarin, if you want to talk Mandarin, you need to teach me as quickly as possible'".

The condition of them not speaking English was that they teach him Mandarin. Saying "If you want to talk Mandarin, you need to teach me as quickly as possible" (Example 4.2e) indicated that they would be excluding Leo by speaking Mandarin. This was a friendly warning that he did not appreciate being excluded from the discussion. This strategy could be very useful to not only remind Chinese students

not to speak in a language that other group members do not understand, but also help those group members who are struggling or annoyed and have not yet voiced their frustration to the group.

### 5.4.3 Adjusting their own communication strategies

Many participants pointed out the importance of making a bigger effort with communication especially when things got tough:

#### Example 4.3a

Q3006: “Even though there were problems for us to understand each other, we communicated a lot and engaged in the group work.”

#### Example 4.3b

Q1067: “I have opened my mind a bit more and expanded my breath of respect. As well, I put more effort in my communication skills.”

In Example 4.3a, the participant emphasises that their group persevered in spite of the “problems for us to understand each other”. In Example 4.3b, the participant describes putting more effort into his or own communication skills alongside being more open and respectful to other viewpoints. The two examples indicate that difficult situations in group interaction could be improved by either individual or the group as a whole making more effort with communication during MGW.

Anneli shared her experience on what she considered helpful in reaching consensus within the group.

#### Example 4.3c

108 [Anneli]: “Well, personally I try to be open, to hear their arguments, then I deliver my opinion with sufficient backup and then I think, in consensus of the group you decide which arguments are stronger and I think it’s very important in those situations, to realise that the agenda that you’re driving, it’s not personal, it is not a criticism towards you, if your opinion is not being used in the group project but instead, everyone has the same goal, right? You want to have the best product or best project at the end of the day so you should be open to hear all the sides”.

She advised openness to everyone else’s arguments for the best end result (“you should be open to hear all the sides”) and emphasised that if one person’s opinion is not being used in the project, it is important not to take it personally, because “it is not a criticism towards you” (Example 4.3c). This might be more effective if a group has a discussion about how they should choose the idea before each starting to their own idea. She suggested that choosing the idea by consensus would lead

to the best product of their MGW. However, some students might value the relationships formed through working in groups over the end product itself, in which case this strategy on reaching consensus might function better once consensus has been discussed and negotiated openly first.

Leo noticed that people respond to different types of argument: some respond to facts and some respond to opinions. He started to employ different strategies he used to persuade group members from different cultural backgrounds:

#### Example 4.3d

103 [Leo]: “I use facts... So I use facts with my Indian friends, so they know, ‘this is based on facts, you can agree with that’, and I use more like opinion and ideas with people from Latin country, they don’t really want the facts, they do really care about what I feel ... So I talk first and then while I’m talking, I try to sense how they are reacting to me, how their facial expressions change and then I sense that there must be something wrong or something right about what I am talking about, so yeah I can ...”

First, he describes the strategy of “us[ing] facts” to persuade “Indian friends” to agree with him, and then the strategy he uses when trying to persuade “people from Latin countries” who seem to care more about feelings. This strategy involves paying attention to their reactions and facial expressions while he is explaining his own ideas, to figure out if he should adjust.

Ivanka experienced a situation where she did not know if her group members actually understood her ideas. After carefully observing her group members’ reactions, she employed a strategy which involved asking questions after she made her own points to check for understanding.

#### Example 4.3e

107 [Ivanka]: “I’ve gained the habit of asking every time I say something, of asking, ‘Do you get what I’m saying’ ... because first it’s a blank, and then you ask, ‘Do you get what I’m saying’, and if then it’s a blank, then they don’t, I figured out what it means. ... It’s always a blank, they don’t say “No, I don’t get it”, I’ve never heard a single person say ‘I didn’t get what you said, could you say that again?’”

Ivanka explained that she used this strategy of double-checking if her groupmates really understood what she meant, because they never admitted to not understanding. It became “a habit” to ask twice (Example 4.3e), because when the groupmates still did not reply, then it was clear they really did not understand her. She also explained that the reason she employed this strategy of continuing to double-check for understanding was because her group members always tended to



look blank to her, and she wanted to make sure that they were able to keep up with the group discussion.

Dhisha observed one of her group member's attempts to include everybody in the discussion and she adopted his strategy as well.

#### Example 4.3f

I07 [Dhisha]: "there was one person in the group who started acting like, I would say he started bringing people back on track, like a peace maker. So, if, say, some of us were not very happy with something, he would sort of make sure that everybody felt comfortable. ... He would make sure that everybody was involved. ...when I saw that he was doing it, I thought, 'ok, I should also try it'. You know, you learn from your group mates, you learn from others... if you see that somebody's quiet, either that person is not interested or that person does not feel confident about speaking up...so make sure that person speaks up. So, that is one thing I learnt from one of my group mates".

Dhisha described this group member's actions as "bringing people back on track, like a peace maker" because he tried to make sure that everybody felt comfortable and involved (Example 4.3f). She observed that it was effective when there were quieter members in the conversation to have someone facilitating in this way, and decided "OK, I should also try it", acknowledging what she had learnt from a groupmate. She did not adopt this way of communicating because she experienced some difficulty but because she could see how it could facilitate smoother group discussion. She firstly noticed someone was 'quiet', then wondered if "that person is not interested or that person does not feel confident about speaking up". She then takes the initiative to "make sure that person speaks up". By making this change, she has shown observation skills, reflective skills and the ability to make meaningful changes that contribute to a better learning environment for everyone. This is more evidence that MGW experience does help students to develop intercultural skills.

#### **5.4.4 Addressing issues explicitly**

Ivanka, Anneli, Leo and Katie discussed experiences of addressing issues more explicitly in MGW as a way of coping with the challenges.

#### Example 4.4a

I06 [Ivanka]: "...it's not a very good thing but with the people who are constantly late, I've stopped trying to be nice and as polite as I can, I'm still polite so I say "Hi" but I don't even pretend that it's okay that they're late, I say that a lot, "Why do we even set times if you're going to be late every time?", or if we can't decide on the time, then they're like "I have this, I have this and then I have a tennis match", I actually turned back and said, "Well, you're going to have to miss that because we don't have time". It's not exactly a coping strategy to be fair but that's the reaction I give if there is tension.

With group members who came late constantly, Ivanka decided not to tolerate it but to voice her frustration and confront them: "I don't even pretend that it's okay that they're late" (Example 4.4a). She also decided to impose some compensation solution to the time they missed, such as rejecting the excuse of leaving early for another engagement.

Anneli and her group decided to express their concerns when dealing with a group member that was not contributing enough on time:

#### Example 4.4b

I02 [Anneli]: "There was one guy however, that what you I guess would call a free rider, traditionally, and he was not available for meetings, he didn't deliver on time and so forth. What we did then, because we were four and there was this one guy that was the problem, we decided to talk to him like all together and explain, "this is the situation, we want to get a good grade on this project and we're excited to get it done, so please can we step it up a little bit so everyone is on the same page?", and he improved quite a bit throughout the project in the end, he understood that deadlines were to be respected and he needed to put as much effort into the work as us. And at the end, the work turned out very well and like we got the best grade in the class and everyone was really happy."

In this group, members voiced their concerns directly to the person who did not deliver, or "what I guess you would call a free rider, traditionally" (Example 4.4b). They approached him together and explained not just their own targets and goal for the project, but also that they were "excited to get it done" and that it was important to step up to reach the same working pace as the others. In this case, the person took it well and the group sorted out their differences, achieved "the best grade in the class" and were all satisfied with the outcome.

Katie's group had a similar approach to address the issue of one group member who did not contribute as expected.

#### Example 4.4c

I09 [Katie]: “In one group there was one who was a little laid back where even if you set the deadline, they would come with half done work. I think that was only the first time, we spoke out that time, “please if we give you deadlines just do it right the first time so we don't have to keep on going back wasting more time and stuff”. But I think it was just more from a point of he didn't know what kind of group we were. I guess the more used you get to working with somebody, the more you know what expectations.”

Researcher: “Was he a little bit embarrassed when he comes with half done work and everybody else had prepared stuff for the meeting?”

I09 [Katie]: “I think so. What we ended up doing was we all did it at that time and we just handled it, and we just moved on to the next thing. We didn't let him feel like he had disappointed us or anything, we just did it, right okay this is what we expected, then we all just chimed in and we did it in 15 minutes.”

Katie describes the situation as more like a misunderstanding of different expectations: “he didn't know what kind of group we were”, rather than that person was not bothering to pull his weight in the group (Example 4.4c). Although they spoke out once (“just do it right the first time so we don't have to keep on going back wasting more time”) when I asked Katie if he was embarrassed about this, she replied that “we didn't let him feel like he had disappointed us or anything”. This was so his feelings would not be hurt and the group relationship remained undamaged.

Leo had some group members who were struggling with English. Rather than not talk about it or do the work for them, Leo decided to draw attention to the problem:

#### Example 4.4d

I03 [Leo]: “For example, they want to say the idea but they're struggling in English so I just say, “I think you should write that down” and when they write it down, oh that's amazing, that's much better... Actually they write it down in Mandarin and they ask their friend to translate it, the friend with better English translates it to me, so probably it's faster to write in Mandarin, it's a complex thing but yeah”.

He suggested they write their ideas down so that he could read about their thoughts on paper, “and when they write it down ... that's much better” (Example 4.4d). When they wrote it in Mandarin, and other group members helped to translate, this strategy helped them work more closely. This strategy not only helped the students who were struggling with speaking English to participate in the group discussions, but also helped the rest of the group to grasp that not speaking up is not equivalent to not having any ideas or to not wanting to participate. The students who struggled to speak in English also had a bit more time to formulate their thoughts while

writing them down and could feel reassured that they were not just simply holding back the group.

#### **5.4.5 Using cultural stereotypes to facilitate the group work process**

After working in multicultural groups through the academic year, many participants reported how their awareness of group members' different communication preferences had developed. Thus, in the later interviews they often drew on nationalities to label and categorise people and their behaviours. Katie, for example, discusses behaviours of "Chinese people" versus British people" when commenting on her MGW experience:

##### Example 4.5a

I09 [Katie]: "Working with the Chinese people I understood they're not good with confrontation or they're more likely to let somebody else take a leadership role. Whereas working with British people, I got the idea everybody wants to have a big idea and kind of like that. So you do get differences in cultures."

Katie compared the different attitudes that she perceived Chinese and British people to display regarding asserting themselves in MGW. According to Katie, the Chinese group members were less confrontational and preferred to "let somebody else take a leadership role" whereas she saw the British as more competitive.

Anneli encountered a lot of challenges at the beginning of her course. Many of them concerned different approaches to studying and group work. For example, she was "irritated" with the Asian and Chinese students' mark-focused approach because it didn't allow for "investing time to have a pleasant experience in the process" (Example 4.5b).

#### Example 4.5b

I02 [Anneli]: “In the beginning, I was a little bit irritated with, well Asian and Chinese way, with their way of being like so goal focused but goal focused towards the mark, I was irritated with the fact that there was not so much room for all the other dynamics of the group, you know? Maybe if you're going to work late, maybe you can work together. In my opinion it's worth investing that time to have a pleasant experience in the process, not just think about work, work, work. ...

And then you have so many South European cultures that have looser way of respecting deadlines, coming in on time, that kind of thing. ...

But partly I saw that change also in others' way of thinking but I think I developed a much stronger tolerance towards it, now when I see a certain cultural way of behaving, I think I understand it.”

Anneli argues that a group can combine being task focused with being relationship focused: “if you're going to work late, maybe you can work together”. She also compares the Asian focus on “work, work, work” with southern Europeans' “looser way of respecting deadlines”. However, she reports that seeing the different working styles made her develop “a much stronger tolerance” towards “others' way of thinking” and also gain an understanding of “a certain cultural way of behaving”. Later, Anneli reflected on this process of becoming more tolerant and on her own behaviour and attitudes:

#### Example 4.5c

I02 [Anneli]: “...you develop a certain buffer, you don't get so easily irritated and you start realising also what's your own culture, like from where I come from, you're very straightforward, you say exactly what you think and what you think should be done and how people behave and stuff. Perhaps you learn to restrict that a little bit, realising that some cultures might be a bit shocked, all that sort of thing”.

Researcher: “Did you ever shock anybody in that way?”

I02 [Anneli]: “In the beginning, I think particularly with the Chinese and Japanese.”

For example, she realised her “very straightforward” and direct communication style was largely rooted in her own national culture (Example 4.5c). She implies that she learnt “to restrict that a little bit” when she realised it might have shocked others. I asked her about this and she acknowledged that “particularly the Chinese and Japanese” might have been shocked in the beginning.

In turn, Anneli was surprised by another style that she observed in MGW:

#### Example 4.5d

I02 [Anneli]: “The South Europeans are used to people screaming and a lot of emotion and when they succeed in the work, it is fantastic and sparkles everywhere and you learn to adapt to those situations, right? So I thought that was interesting”.

She comments on a high-involvement style (“people screaming and a lot of emotion”) as something another cultural group is more used to. She talks about learning to adapt to the behaviour of the South Europeans and appreciate their emotional way of communicating when work is successful, because it is “fantastic and sparkles everywhere” (Example 4.5d).

#### Example 4.5e

I02 [Anneli]: “I found you should not always so strongly say stuff negatively [to Asian and Chinese group members]. If you're feeling negatively about something, you can sugar-coat it a little bit not to shock – or embarrass – I realised how [important] it is not to lose face for some cultures, so you learn, sort of penalisation for bad behaviour perhaps needs to be adjusted according to which culture you deal with”.

Anneli also explained that she had learnt it was important “not to lose face for some cultures” (Example 4.5e). She advised “sugar-coat[ing]” negative feedback to avoid embarrassing people, and learning to adjust ways of penalising bad behaviour depending on the cultural background of the person. This illustrated her understanding of differences in politeness across cultures and of using alternative communication strategies based on other people’s communication style.

Leo also reported noticing many different communication styles and working styles through working in multicultural groups. To describe the different behaviours, he used nationalities as labels or categories to differentiate his group members:

#### Example 4.5f

I03 [Leo]: "...if you work with Asians in the discussion, they will stay silent, it doesn't mean they don't understand, they do understand and they're waiting for time to speak up.

For Indians, if you have ideas just say it out loud, they don't mind;

People say Germans are very efficient ... They seem really efficient but if you find someone like Scandinavian, like from Finland, Sweden they're much more German than German, they work faster, they're efficient, it's like working with engines, it's like working with robot, they don't smile a lot...

I don't know the Germans very well or Scandinavian people quite well.... but I don't think they understand like jokes and they don't understand the way how you procrastinate in a group, like my way in the group work is we sit down, we talk a bit, we share food, we share snacks but they don't. They sit down, open their laptops and start reading things, they don't have like ... they work quickly and it's like something's missing, ... there is no informal communication, everything they talk is about the task, about the group job, it's kind of boring,

People from Spain or Italy, they tend to [be] like us, just sit there and enjoy life. Maybe different culture".

In this example, Leo describes different types of communication and working styles. Interestingly, he attributes those differences to different countries of origin in quite a sweeping way: Asians "will stay silent" but "they do understand and they're waiting for time to speak up", and that Indians "don't mind" if you "just say it out aloud" (Example 4.5a). He illustrates the difference between task-focused group members from northern Europe (e.g. Finnish, Swedish, German) who "don't smile a lot" or "understand ... jokes", and more relationship-focused group members from southern Europe (e.g. Spanish, Italian) who "tend to be like us, just sit there and enjoy life". He describes his own tendency toward procrastination ("we sit down, we talk a bit, we share food, we share snacks") as something the "efficient" northern Europeans don't understand.

Leo then explained how he tried to facilitate the MGW process based on the differences he noticed. Specifically, one of the approaches he used was to adjust his own way of talking:

#### Example 4.5g

I03 [Leo]: "if you talk with Indian, you need to talk louder and look like angry! And if I talk with my Chinese friend, I try to use English word in a very simple way, so I don't use very long sentence, I just use short, short, short and then that's it, so sometimes I just give them the point as they will understand, so I don't have to talk with long sentences, what I mean is "this is like this", so I don't have to orient in the grammars as well, it's better".

He described the different strategies he used with group members from China and India, for example, a high-involvement style (e.g. “talk[ing] louder and look[ing] ... angry”) with Indians, and a “simple” grammatical style (e.g. using shorter sentences) with Chinese (Example 4.5g). In addition, he reported how his group would divide the tasks accordingly so that each of them could do what they do best:

Example 4.5h

I03 [Leo]: “In every presentation, we let the Indians go forward and do the debates and do the presentation and while the rest of us, we just provide the support, back up and we get on with it, we do the details. Because when we are in debate, we tend to stay silent”.

For example, this involved his group “let[ting] the Indians go forward” to speak in debates and presentations, while “we do the details” (Example 4.5h).

In the last three examples, Leo pictures a journey of how he and his groups learned about each other and tried to make the best out of the situation. The students started noticing different communication and working styles, but then connected those differences to cultural stereotypes. People are no longer being seen as individuals but are being categorised by their nationality, which informs group members’ behaviour and decision making.

In a way, students did work out a formula to get a better mark by making the most of each other’s advantages and skills, such as letting those who speak louder present the result and letting those who are efficient and more collaborative prepare the facts and content. However, instead of saying someone who speaks louder and is good at debate should do the presentation so their audience and lecturer could understand better, Leo and his group members referred to this strategy as “let the Indians present” and let the others “do the details”. Thus, while the intention of MGW often is to provide students with exposure to people from different cultures, which should help them learn to challenge cultural stereotypes, it is quite evident here that students actually constructed new stereotypes and relied on these stereotypes to facilitate the group work.

Even more, the cognitive benefits of MGW, such as helping students gain more creative ideas through in-depth discussion and learning to give feedback, are likely lost where students use these stereotypes to decide who would do what instead of engaging in group discussion and working out each other’s personal strengths and



weaknesses. Thus, it seems that MGW might have the exact opposite outcome than originally intended. On the other hand, positive learning occurred in MGW as detailed in previous sections. This suggests that MGW can be really positive but needs to be a) better prepared (for example through intercultural training and discussion about biases and stereotypes), b) better supported throughout the MGW from lecturers who can counteract such patterns and challenge such assumptions as they are being made, and c) better structured so that students can reflect on the experiences and draw deeper learning from them than they currently appear to be doing.

#### **5.4.6 Being more supportive and flexible**

As discussed in section 5.2.3, many participants learnt to be more patient and respectful towards other group members through MGW. The patience and respect towards others helped them to become more flexible and tolerant regarding the different styles of thinking, learning and communicating when working in multicultural groups. As a result, students started to act more flexibly when encountering challenges in MGW.

Jaime encountered a group where one group member refused to communicate with the other because of unresolved conflicts. She was the appointed leader of the group, and this one group member would only speak to her. The rest of the group could only communicate with this person via Jaime. She shared her thoughts about dealing with the challenge of being caught in the middle of this communication triangle:

##### Example 4.6a

Researcher: “What did you do when the situation got so difficult?”

I05 [Jaime]: “Keep your mouth shut (laughs). Don’t say what you’re thinking (laughs)... think about, okay, this isn’t even being assessed, so just play nice. Actually I call it play nice. It’s like if someone is being difficult, try to do as much as you can to mediate the situation. So like I tried to get the girl to speak to the other girl, didn’t work, and so I thought, well okay, then I’m just going to suck it up but I’m going to be like the group leader and I’m just going to take the other girl’s ideas and pass them through me to her so we all can communicate in this weird way. But I think just like the best saying is try to be understanding and patient and just look at the bigger picture; that it doesn’t really matter that much in the grand scheme of life.”

Jaime explained that she called the strategy she used in this situation “play nice”, and it involved trying to “do as much as you can to mediate” and “to be

understanding and patient” (Example 4.6a). Jaime took responsibility in this difficult situation for trying to work around the communication breakdown. For her, being supportive of others in MGW is part of leadership.

Similarly, Anneli talked about bringing her experience and understanding of cultural differences to MGW.

#### Example 4.6b

I02 [Anneli]: “I think the more experience you develop with group works, your responsibility also of supporting others becomes bigger, like with greater power is greater responsibility, it sounds ridiculous but I think it’s true when in group work, if you understand where a certain behaviour is coming from or if you see that someone is extremely shy or uncomfortable [about] speaking up in the group, then I think it’s your responsibility to try to bring that person forward, open the floor for them and not go on with your agenda. At the end of the day, I think the group work that they organised here, it’s not so much about the final project, it’s preparing us for the future career.”

Anneli argues that group members who had more experience would have a “bigger” responsibility to support the others who have less (Example 4.6b), such as being more accommodating to others who are less outspoken. She explains this is because experience makes them able to notice and understand different communication and working styles, including if someone was “extremely shy or uncomfortable”. She suggests that the main objective of group work is in fact “preparing us for the future career”, which includes learning to be responsible for “bringing [others] forward” rather than just pursuing “your own agenda”. Dhisha shared the same idea of being more supportive and helping other group members to speak up during the group discussions in Example 4.3f.

Some other participants also commented on how adjusting their own behaviour and building up their tolerance of difference and ambiguity helped them through difficult situations during MGW:

#### Example 4.6c

Q3107.1: “I learnt to develop more trust toward my group members and I became less irritable concerning the working style of all the person I worked with.”

#### Example 4.6d

I09 [Katie]: “...being a bit more realistic and flexible”.

#### Example 4.6e

I03 [Leo]: “Well, if someone else is not flexible, I try to be flexible, that’s usually how I would cope with it, I think”.

#### Example 4.6f

Q3127: “I have learned that we need to compromise ourselves. Before the course, I knew that we were different, but I thought I could get used to it or handle it. But now I can say that it is very annoying even if I expect the difference and try to be ready for it. It is impossible to change others’ background or characters”.

In Example 4.6c, the participant reported that after learning to develop trust in other group members, their different working styles did not make them as “irritable” as they had initially. Both Katie (Example 4.6d) and Leo (Example 4.6e) mentioned trying to be more flexible as important. The participant in Example 23f also suggests the need to “compromise” and to adjust one’s own way of working and thinking, because it is “impossible to change others’ background or characters” and it was not helpful to allow oneself to get frustrated over difference.

### **5.4.7 Section conclusion**

Section 5.4 has presented a range of evidence on students’ insights into how to cope with challenges they encountered during MGW. The participants made suggestions for coping strategies based on what they had actually employed in their own MGW and what they thought could be helpful based on their experience. Suggestions typically included being more observant and paying more attention to others during group interaction. Other recommendations concerned advice on the logistics of organising and co-ordinating the work, such as setting realistic deadlines as a group and creating a sample formula for group members to follow. Participants also commented on adjusting their style of communication to mediate any differences between their and other group members’ communication styles. The importance of addressing problems quickly before they become bigger issues and harder to deal with was also highlighted by the students. Some participants relied on cultural stereotypes to make sense of and categorise the different communication and working habits of their group members. However, this might not be very constructive for their long-term intercultural learning. Being more supportive towards other group members and more flexible during a challenging situation was found to be effective by a number of participants.

Many of these strategies employed by students seem problematic however, as they were a result of an unsupported and unfacilitated MGW experience in which students were left by lecturers to work together according to a “sink or swim” approach. It is interesting that none of the participants mentioned when they faced difficulties whether there was someone from their academic department or the university they could turn to for help. It might mean that either there was no established support for students who were experiencing difficulties in MGW, or it was not made very clear to all the students that the support was available. The insights these participants shared should help further inform practitioners in HE as they strive to create more effective and supportive MGW learning environments.

## 5.5 Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how students demonstrated recognition of the many benefits of MGW, both the immediate ones such as academic achievements as well as long term personal growth and employability skills. They also emphasised particularly how difficult the process of MGW was and how many challenges they had to go through while working under considerable time pressure and academic pressure. Participants in this research also discussed in detail the challenges they encountered and the possible reasons behind them. Some of the students were positive about all these difficulties, but many had developed more negative attitudes toward working in multicultural groups and also towards their group members.

When students were working through the differences and difficulties they encountered, they developed a variety of coping strategies that they employed both intentionally and unintentionally. Considering how they developed these strategies and how they reflected on the challenges, there seems to be a need to provide more support for students before and during MGW, such as raising awareness, developing and distributing training materials and a closer monitoring of the ongoing teamwork by teaching staff. For Higher Education Institutions who seek to internationalise and provide a global learning student experience, there should be more support activities and resources for students to develop their skills in working and communicating across cultures in parallel to their multicultural academic work. In addition, more teaching and intercultural learning support and resources should

be provided for the lecturers who have an interest in using MGW in their teaching, so that the design of the tasks used for MGW, the support for students during the process of MGW and the assessment of MGW could all benefit from the lecturers' improved intercultural awareness.

## 6 Conclusion

In this chapter I will elaborate on how the combination of the quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis can present a fuller picture of postgraduate students' perspective of multicultural group work. This will show that despite the fact that postgraduate students were not likely to change their attitudes towards multicultural group work, even when they rated MGW negatively, they still acknowledged the skills learning perspective in their experience of working in mixed groups. These in turn can be considered as factors influencing students' experience of working in mixed groups and things to improve to better facilitate a better intercultural learning environment for postgraduate students from the point of view of practitioners in the HE sector. The limitations of the findings will also be presented. Finally, recommendations will be made which suggest how in the future better design of the content of the group work, better facilitation of the process of multicultural group work, and last but not least, the assessment criteria of MGW can be improved.

This study aimed to find out how and to what extent postgraduate taught students' attitudes towards multicultural group work undergoes transformation during the course of their degree studies and what factors are perceived by them as promoting a more positive multicultural group learning experience. In achieving this and also in establishing new knowledge about students' perceptions of the benefits, even when the group work goes badly, and the diverse coping strategies students use, it makes an important contribution to the fields of intercultural communication and the internationalisation of Higher Education.

### 6.1 Summary of quantitative findings on attitudes towards MGW

#### 6.1.1 Findings from Questionnaire Term 1

The analysis of data from Questionnaire Term 1 shows that the participants in this study in general recognised the benefits of group work well, and they also valued the benefits of working in mixed groups. The benefits of group work they agreed on include: learning different opinions, broaden understanding of the knowledge and subject, learning from peers' contribution, getting feedback from peers, and

reflecting and re-evaluating their own ideas. The benefits of working in a multicultural group they agreed on include: meeting people from different cultures, understanding of the wider world community, improving language skills, increased flexibility in communication and practice of working in diverse teams in future workplace. This finding is consistent with previous research on students' perceptive on the benefits of multicultural group work (Caspersz, Skene, Wu, & Boland, 2004; Mello, 1993; Montgomery, 2009)

The data also shows that the participants had a very diverse perception of the challenges in working in groups, but still most of them were more likely to agree with the difficulties of working in groups reported in the literature (Beebe & Masterson, 2014; Freeman, 1995; Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003). These challenges include: difficulties in reaching consensus, practicality in arrangement of meetings, coordination of workload and increased probability of conflicts during group discussion.

Most of the participants did not prefer to be assessed on an individual basis, or consider other group members would drag their score down, believing it was mostly fair to assess the group work based on the performance of the entire group. This general impression of more fair than unfair was also reported in previous research (Gaur & Gupta, 2013). However, as the literature shows, home students and native English speakers may consider that international students or L2 speakers are dragging their mark down even though in reality it was not the case (De Vita, 2002; Strauss, U-Mackey, & Crothers, 2014). In this study, most of the participants are non-UK students and L2 speakers, which could be the reason why most participants thought it was fair to be assessed as a whole group.

It was also found in the analysis of the Questionnaire Term 1 data that most of the participants disagreed with the challenges of multicultural group work, including different first language backgrounds and cultural backgrounds. This means these challenges reported in the literature (Popov et al., 2012; Summers & Volet, 2008; Turner, 2009) were not perceived as the main barriers in working in multicultural groups.

The analysis of Questionnaire Term 1 data also suggested that the students who recognised the benefits of working in groups also recognised the value of working

in multicultural groups. Those who recognised the benefits of multicultural group work, would be likely to find it less challenging to work in multicultural groups. Further to that, the less they found MGW challenging, the more benefits they perceived about MGW. The students who considered GW and MGW beneficial did not prefer to be assessed on an individual base. Those who did prefer to be assessed individually found it more challenging working with other people in groups in general.

Based on the findings above, it could be concluded that the preference for being assessed has no relationship to whether the group is multicultural or not, but rather relates to the student's own liking of group work as a learning activity. The participants who enjoy working in groups with others also benefitted more from the multicultural group work, and they praised the benefits of diversity more. Those who found working in groups with others is generally difficult also preferred to be assessed based on their own individual performance.

It was also found in the analysis that Chinese students found it more difficult to deal with the challenges they encountered in multicultural groups, and they were more likely to prefer to be assessed on the performance of the whole group compared to students from other regions. It has been reported in the literature that Chinese students tend to struggle with group work when studying in multicultural environments (Li & Campbell, 2008; McMahon, 2011; Turner, 2006). The findings in the present study suggested that most of the non-native English speakers found it more challenging when working in multicultural groups. The quantitative data could not provide an answer to the reason why they would prefer to be assessed as a whole group. However, it is more than reasonable to want to be part of a group, which could help to deal with any difficulties that an individual faced.

It was found in the analysis that native English speakers had a stronger preference for being assessed individually than the non-native English speakers. This could be because native English speakers worried that international students or L2 speakers would drag their mark down (De Vita, 2002; Strauss, U-Mackey, & Crothers, 2014). However, this is the finding from their response in Term 1, when many of the participants only encountered multicultural group work for the first time and also had limited experience of working in groups for academic purposes. Therefore,



how they responded to the questionnaire in Term 3 would provide more information on how they perceived MGW. The analysis of data from Questionnaire Term 3 shows that when the students were surveyed again, after all of their taught classes and multicultural group work were complete, they maintained similar attitudes towards MGW.

### **6.1.2 Findings from Questionnaire Term 3**

In Term 3, the participants still agreed with the benefits of group work in general, and also thought as highly of the benefits of working in multicultural groups as they did in Term 1. Most of the participants still did not want to be assessed on an individual basis. Their perceptions of the challenges in working in groups are quite diverse, but they also still agreed with the difficulties of working in groups in general. Similar to their answers in Term 1, the participants' continuing disagreement with them shows that different languages and cultures were not perceived as serious barriers to working in multicultural groups.

The findings of the analysis of Questionnaire Term 3 data also suggested that students who recognised the benefits of working in groups also recognised the value of working in multicultural groups. They still would not want to be assessed on an individual basis. The findings also suggest that students who found it more challenging working with others in groups in general also found multicultural group work more challenging as well. They did not value the benefits of multicultural group work as much as others and would prefer to be assessed on their own performance. These findings are all consistent with Term 1 data.

In the analysis of Term 3 data, students from different regional groups had some slightly more different attitudes towards multicultural group work compared to Term 1. Students from China and students from regional group Other, so in other words, non-EEA country students, had more positive opinions on how working in groups was beneficial to them compared to students from UK, who are the home students in this study, even though most of the whole participant population agreed with the benefits of working in groups. Only students from the regional group Other found not as challenging to manage group work compared to participants from EEA countries (including UK) and China. In Term 3, Chinese students continued to find multicultural group work more challenging than other participants. This finding is

the same as in Term 1, so that they did not have a change in their attitudes or perceptions of multicultural group work during the course of their study.

### **6.1.3 Findings from comparison of two questionnaires**

Compared to their responses in Term 1, non-native speakers decided the challenges that happened during working in groups in Term 3 were more about managing the process of group work rather than difference in first languages and cultures. Additionally, most native speakers who responded to the Term 3 questionnaire found it less difficult to manage the challenges in working in groups and did not prefer to be assessed individually. The difference in the comparison of subgroups' scores made it more interesting to see if it was the same individuals who changed their attitudes in Term 3, or if the different scores were caused by the results of the respondents in Term 1 who did not answer Questionnaire Term 3. In order to explore this, Questionnaire Term 3 data was linked with Questionnaire Term 1 data using respondents' email addresses. A longitudinal comparison was conducted to explore if the same participants changed their attitudes over time during the course of their study.

One change was found in how students from the regional group Other changed their perceptions of challenges they face when they work in groups for their academic courses, from agreeing that a lot of difficulties happened when they work in groups with other students (Term 1  $M=3.69$ , score above 3.5) to no longer perceiving the challenges that happened during GW as difficult (Term 3  $M=3.33$ , score below 3.5) as before. Another change was found in native English speakers' attitudes towards managing challenges when working in groups, from finding it difficult ( $M=3.70$ , score above 3.5) to not as difficult ( $M=3.45$ , score below 3.5).

### **6.1.4 Conclusion: Little change in attitudes towards MGW during course of study**

This concludes all the findings from the quantitative data analysis. One can argue that most of the participants in this study had no change in their attitudes toward multicultural group work during a one-year master's course in a UK university. This part of the findings provided answers to my secondary research question 1: "What differences are discernible between the attitudes of students at the

commencement and conclusion of their one-year postgraduate taught course?”

Secondary research question 2: “To what factors are perceived attitudinal changes attributable?” could not be directly answered, as there was no significant change found. However, there were factors identified in the difference of students’ attitudes, which could contribute to answering the primary research question “How and to what extent do postgraduate taught students’ attitudes towards mixed-culture group work undergo transformation during the course of their degree studies and what factors are perceived as promoting a more positive mixed-culture group learning experience?”

Some small difference was found in the scores when comparing different regional and first languages groups, even though most of the respondents disagreed with different first languages and cultures as challenges that happened during multicultural group work. The quantitative data could not explain why and how the difference of regions and languages influenced students’ answers. This provided an important reason to explore the qualitative data to find possible explanations for differences found in the quantitative analysis.

## 6.2 Summary of qualitative findings on perceptions of MGW

### **6.2.1 Multicultural group work helps achieve academic objectives and fosters skills development**

In the qualitative analysis, both positive and negative perceptions of multicultural group work were reported by the participants. They reported many aspects of how multicultural group work was beneficial to them, and these aspects could be roughly divided into two groups: academic objectives and skills development. Academically, working in a multicultural group benefitted students in providing a space to learn from different perspectives brought by peers, allowing students to be more creative together and giving students opportunities to get feedback from peers as well as give feedback to others. The diversity of the groups on the one hand provided creativity, but made the efficiency of the process more unpredictable. When the multicultural group work process was perceived to be generally pleasant by the participants, there was also perceived to be a positive impact on their academic development.

Multicultural group work was also perceived to provide a platform for developing interpersonal and other employability skills by the participants in this study. Participants mentioned that both positive and negative conflicts happened during working in a multicultural group, therefore the conflicts provided chances for them to practise the skills to resolve the conflicts. Communication and negotiation was an important part of MGW, as participants also commented that they improved their communication and negotiation skills during MGW. What was reported mostly and repeatedly by the participants in this study was how they developed more patience and respect towards their team members after a certain period of studying together in groups. This is an important element in personal growth as well as building an employability skill set.

Last but not least, the diversity of the group was much appreciated and perceived as an important benefit of MGW. Participants commented on how they could only develop intercultural communication skills through practice and MGW was a great opportunity. The exposure to a multicultural environment was also reported as beneficial because it not only provided chances to meet fellow students from other cultures, but being compelled to work with peers from different cultural backgrounds motivated them to learn more about others. Learning about other countries' facts, political situations, facing different working and communication styles in different cultures and learning to deal with the difference were all reported as benefits of multicultural group work. All these perceived benefits reported above are an essential part of how individuals develop their intercultural skills.

### **6.2.2 Challenges of working in multicultural groups work remain**

There were also many challenges of multicultural group work perceived by the participants. Among all the challenges, different levels of English proficiency were reported as one of the most difficult part for students to deal with, as students of lower spoken English proficiency would see multicultural group work as a chance to practise English, and native English speakers and students higher level of English speaking skills considered it a burden and more importantly that "practising English" was not part of group work. The participants also explained the time pressure and percentage of the mark for group work often contribute to the increase in conflicts among group members as most of the one-year master's courses often

packed large amounts of knowledge content and workload within very tight schedules. All the differences that were considered as beneficial by some participants could potentially be used as excuses for increasing the amount of conflict, for example, if the difference in personalities and views could not be resolved, that would cause more conflict. When students have different priorities and expect different standards of the quality of the work, it will increase the conflicts if they fail to have a discussion and negotiate an agreement based on everybody's expectations. In the process, when negotiating and communicating about the content of group work, some students saw it as opportunities to practise negotiation and communication skills, while when they could not reach a consensus in the end or it required more efforts to reach consensus because of different views, some participants would consider this as the difficulties of working in groups, especially in a multicultural group. This situation also applied to different communication and working styles that students were facing. While students were exposed to the differences between people to broaden their understanding of the knowledge and the world in general, these differences also hindered the process of working smoothly in groups. The differences and difficulties that resulted in students' different attitudes to whether it was fair to assess the group work based on the entire performance of the group, or whether they should get individual marks based on the efforts they put in. Some participants in the end started to use nationalities to label their group members and it contributed to creating and reinforcing negative national stereotypes.

### **6.2.3 Students developed coping strategies to manage the challenges in MGW**

As students faced many challenges in working in multicultural groups, they developed their own coping strategies to deal with the difficulties along the way. Many of them started to pay more attention to the details when interacting with other group members, and created basic rules for working together. When facing difference, some participants learnt to adjust their own communication strategies to accommodate the different level of language proficiency, communication and working styles. In order to make sure the conflicts did not influence the group work process and group members' relationships, some of them had chosen to address issues explicitly. Last but not least, the participants in this study used many national

stereotypes as references for the different behaviours other than their own. Some also created different communication and collaboration strategies based on those national stereotypes to work better with their group members. These findings provided answers to my secondary research question 3: “How do students describe the strategies they have developed for accommodating to their peers and working more effectively and productively in multicultural groups?”

However, although the above strategies were employed or recommended by the participants for dealing with their own difficult situations in MGW, it is important to point out that some of the strategies are rather problematic and might potentially affect students’ own intercultural learning in a negative way.

### 6.3 Combining quantitative and qualitative findings: Overview of perspectives on MGW

In comparing the summary of quantitative and qualitative findings above, it could be seen that even though most of the participants did not consider culture and first languages as barriers when they filled in the questionnaires, both times, in the qualitative data, when they started to explain what was difficult and challenging for them when working in multicultural groups. Different communication and working styles and different proficiencies in English was reported repeatedly by the participants as factors hinder the group work process. This comparison could explain the difference found in the scores when comparing different regional and first languages groups, even though most of the respondents disagreed with different first languages and cultures as the challenges during their multicultural group work experiences. On the other hand, this reality check makes it more important to look into the coping strategies that participants developed when dealing with difficulties. These self-developed coping strategies are rather creative and unsystematic, and they were also results of students managing massive amount of time and work load pressure during their one-year master course, which they were required to complete the taught modules and assignments including group work within 8 months. One could only guess that it is because in the end students coped with the difficulties using their own ways, so that they no longer considered cultural and first languages different as some challenges they could not overcome,

hence disagreeing with the statements in the questionnaires. This should make practitioners in HE think if there is anything that academic teaching staff and course administrators could some help and facilitate in order to make the multicultural group work process less stressful for students to deal with. For example, promoting intercultural awareness by introducing students to different communication and working styles before the group work starts so that students do not need to learn the difference through conflicts and clashes. Workshops for practising intercultural skills and coping with difference could also help students to think more positively of the multicultural group work experience because they will not need to rely on national stereotypes to resolve the differences.

Many participants pointed out how the mark had an impact on students' attitudes towards the working with other people, and more importantly the fear of being dragged down by others. This could result from the current assessment criteria of group work was mainly focusing on the end product of the work, mostly base on one piece of written work and or a final presentation. As this participant stated (Example 3.7q):

Q1100: "However, as group work usually has a dominant goal (especially when it will be assessed) more important than the communication improvement and idea generation and organization, it usually draw my attention to the friction and the lack of efficiency during our communication due to various logics and language skills"

As it was discussed in the literature review, the reason why group work is used in the Higher Education, and all the potential benefits of using it are mainly about the positive impacts of interaction with peers. Then why is the assessment of group work only focused on the end product but hardly anything on the interaction? The learning goals and outcome of group work has never been about the product, namely, written assignments or presentations, and it has always been about collaborative learning, and this is actually the part students considered to be a barrier to them getting a better mark. This should inform future research on challenging the status quo of the design of MGW and the assessment criteria of MGW. The design and assessment criteria of MGW should actually reflect the importance of the process of working in MGW. In addition, performance during MGW should be included in the evaluation, so that students could actually understand that learning how to work in a multicultural group is a priority and make more effort during the work process.

## 6.4 Contribution to the literature

This study has made several significant contributions to the knowledge on multicultural group work in HE. First of all, the quantitative findings suggest that more experience of MGW does not necessarily have an impact on students' established attitudes towards MGW. Secondly, the qualitative findings provide a detailed account of what is perceived by students to have caused or attributed to the conflicts that happened during MGW. Thirdly, if the MGW process is unfacilitated and unsupported, it might reinforce cultural stereotypes rather than helping students to challenge the stereotypes. Finally, students are likely to form their own coping strategies when facing difficulties during MGW; however, many of the strategies are problematic and more of a bandage solution, rather than systematic strategies for managing difference.

### 6.4.1 Methodological innovations

As mentioned at the end of chapter 2, my research was inspired by previous research on multicultural group work, especially Volet's research. Compared to Volet's research with undergraduate students, my participants in this study are students at postgraduate level. Instead of comparing students' attitudes before and after one single group task, my study provided a comparison of the same students' attitudes at the beginning of their degree and the end of their degree. This sheds more light on students' learning experience in multicultural group work.

It is interesting to find out the long-term benefits that students acknowledged did not make a difference on changing their attitudes towards multicultural group work, which should bring it attention to future researchers and practitioners in Higher Education that there should be some substantial changes to how multicultural group work is designed, and more importantly how it should be assessed, if we are hoping to facilitate and foster a more positive environment for learning in a internationalising world of HE.

Apart from the age gap of the student population (undergraduates and postgraduates), and the longitudinal factor, there is also a gap in how students see working in mixed groups for developing their intercultural skills. Research reported on challenges and attitudes, and found that students did recognise some benefits of



working in groups. However, the assessment of their attitudes does not necessary reflect on the actual experience and the skills they develop. For example, the possibility of students who have negative attitudes towards working in mixed groups might also help them develop problem-solving skills when dealing with challenges that was never reported or researched. In my study, the open-ended question in the end of both questionnaires provided a space for students to reflect and re-evaluate their own experiences, which worked very effectively, considering how up front and straightforward they were when writing about their experience.

In my interviews with participants, some students were shown their own scores in both terms, as well as the whole participant population's average mean on each statements. Showing them their own changes, as well as showing them the difference between themselves and others, made it a very refreshing and quite exciting experience for the participants. Then they were invited to comment on their own scores about why they choose to score like that at that specific time and what might be the reasons for their change. This way of combining quantitative data and qualitative interviews makes the mixed methods study more internally connected. This is a fairly new approach to research how students experience multicultural group work.

## 6.5 Limitations of the study

Even though the University of Warwick has a large proportion of international students, most of the international students are Chinese, so that the degree of how multicultural are the student groups is limited when discussing the impact of diversity of groups. Additionally, this research is only conducted in one Higher Education Institution in the UK, so there is limited representativeness of the entire postgraduate student population.

Only questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were used in this research, so the data was all self-report data on students' own perceptions of their multicultural group work. If there were more observation data on the actual interaction of students working together, as well as academic staff's perspectives on students'

performance, it would have made the evaluation of the multicultural group work experience more objective.

As the contact information was collected from university website's people directory, there was no guarantee that my questionnaire had reached all of the postgraduate students who were studying master's degrees in that specific academic year. The respondent rate of Questionnaire Term 1 could not be provided. Additionally, the question of gender only had three answer options: male, female and prefer not to say. Ethically speaking it would have been preferable it were an open-ended question like the question on their first languages.

As a female Chinese international PhD candidate who has previously studied in this same institution and had many experiences of multicultural group work, I did bring insights into designing the research. However, my own cultural conditioning and previous experience also influenced my evaluation of the interview data and how I managed the rapport with interviewees, even though I used different communication strategies to minimise the effect of cultural bias. My unintentional impact might be reflected by the fact that only two male participants took part in the interviews, and that there was no representation of home students in the interviews. However, it is important to point out that only those participants who completed 4 points of data collection are included in this research as interview participants. There were several more male participants and two home students who participated in the Questionnaire Term 1 and Interview I. However, as they did not complete Phase II data collection, their data was excluded, hence the gender imbalance and the missing representation of home students in the interview data. The home student voice was still represented in the form of questionnaire data (both quantitative and qualitative) in this study.

## 6.6 Recommendations for practitioners in HE and for future research

In order to provide a better intercultural learning environment for students, additional support should be provided. The university administration should consider making more effort to promote intercultural awareness and workshops to develop intercultural communication skills. The academic teaching staff could

adjust the design of multicultural group work, such as designing tasks in a way that requires different skills and so that students need to be more dependent on other group members, in order to prompt them to work more closely and collaboratively with each other. More importantly, a change in the assessment criteria is recommended, to make it more explicit to students that their interaction more valuable than the end product, so that they would no longer consider group work's primary goal as getting a high individual mark. Work logs and reflection sessions after the group assignments could be introduced to facilitate the process.

Students as the key agents of their own multicultural group work experience should also contribute to improving the intercultural learning environment by actively providing feedback to the lecturers, academic departments and other relevant departments within the institution who could assist in providing better support for students' skills development. Students' self-organised peer-support for dealing with challenges in MGW, such as a debrief after the MGW within the group, or an experience-sharing session with the whole class after the MGW just among students, would also be productive for students to learn from each other's experience.

In future research, it might be worth looking into what type of support would be more effectively help students develop the necessary intercultural skills to work more effectively in groups. Also, more research on the actual interaction of students working together would provide valuable insights to help understand students' communication within teams, and more importantly, help to update the design and assessment criteria of multicultural group work.

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## 8 Appendices

### 8.1 Appendix 1a

#### Cover letter Term 1

Dear lovely Warwick postgraduate students

My name is Xiaozhe Cai (Sherry), a 2nd year PhD candidate in Centre for Applied Linguistics.

Now the term time is over and I know many of you just went through a lot of deadlines and exams (which is why I am bothering you at this vacation time...), I am sure you've done well and deserve a very nice break!

I will be very grateful if you would share a bit of your vacation time to help me: I am doing a research on students' perception of mixed-culture groupwork and I am looking for current (2014-2015) master's students to help me with my study.

As a current master student at the University of Warwick, have you been working with your classmates on presentations and projects? Are you interested in why we have to do so much groupwork? How will this groupwork thing benefit you in which ways? What will change your attitudes towards groupwork throughout your postgraduate study?

This following questionnaire is asking about your current thoughts which will help me to understand your experience. My research is hoping to map out how exactly students feel about groupwork and how it should be improved from students' perspectives. It will take about 15 mins of your time and I will draw a prize from all the questionnaire respondents. It will be a £30 voucher!

I am very looking forward to your response and thank you very much in advance for the help. If you are interested in the result please get in touch and I am more than happy to share it with you!

Link to the questionnaire: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/xiaozhe>

Best wishes

Xiaozhe Cai (Sherry)

## 8.2 Appendix 1b

### Cover letter Term 3

Hello!

Thank you for coming back!

Similar to the previous questionnaire, the first section asks for basic information about you, such as where you are from and what course you are studying. The remainder of the questionnaire consists of two parts, one is about general information of the groups you worked in and the other one is about your thoughts on groupwork. Please respond to all of the statements.

Please read the statements carefully and tick the number on the right of each statement that reflects your views most closely. You will remain anonymous and your responses will also be confidential, so please feel free to respond as honestly as possible.

Thank you again for helping me with my research. It's greatly appreciated.

Best,

Sherry (CAI Xiaozhe 蔡小哲)



### 8.3 Appendix 2: Consent form

#### **Participation Consent Form**

**Research Project Title:**

Students' intercultural group work at University of Warwick

**Information of researchers:**

Researcher - Xiaozhe Cai is a PhD student at the Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick.

Supervisor - Dr. Neil Murray is an academic staff at the Centre for Applied Linguistics, University of Warwick

**Purpose of the study and participation**

You are invited to participate in a study on students' intercultural group work experience. This research is designed to investigate whether postgraduate students' attitudes towards intercultural group work change throughout their first year of study at the University of Warwick and the factors associated with any changes that are evident. It includes a particular focus on those students who attend the Warwick Pre-session English Language Course to see if and to what extent these students' attitudes and first experience differ from those of other postgraduate students.

This study uses following research methods and your participation may involve at least one of them:

- 1) Questionnaires
- 2) Interviews (audio-recorded, 2 sessions)

Participation is voluntary and should you choose not to participate, your decision will be respected and you will not be subject to any penalty or prejudice. Equally, should you choose to participate, you are also free to withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice. The data collected from your participation will be kept confidential and only used for research purposes. In order to ensure that your identity is protected, your name will not be used at any point.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns regarding this research. I will be happy to share with you the results of my research and my thesis will be available to you once this research is complete.

*Xiaozhe Cai*    01/2015

## 8.4 Paper Version of Questionnaire

### Students' Perceptions of Groupwork at University of Warwick (Term 1)

<i>Email</i>									
<i>Age</i>		<i>Gender</i>			<i>Nationality</i>				
<i>First Language(s)</i>					<i>Level of Study</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate Taught <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate <input type="checkbox"/> Postgraduate Research				
<i>Course and year of study</i>									
<i>Did you attend Pre-sessional English language course?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No									
<b>Study abroad experience (country and length of stay)</b> _____ Country _____ Months _____ Country _____ Months _____ Country _____ Months									
<b>PART A</b>									
<b>In the past, how large were the of groups your worked on average (including yourself)?</b> <input type="checkbox"/> 3 <input type="checkbox"/> 4 <input type="checkbox"/> 5 <input type="checkbox"/> 6 <input type="checkbox"/> 7 <input type="checkbox"/> 8 <input type="checkbox"/> 9 <input type="checkbox"/> 10 <input type="checkbox"/> 11 <input type="checkbox"/> 12 <input type="checkbox"/> 13 <input type="checkbox"/> 14 <input type="checkbox"/> 15 <input type="checkbox"/> 16 or more									
<b>Group work experience prior to your postgraduate study: please circle the most relevant number (1 = Strongly Disagree and 6 = Strongly Agree, N/A = Not Applicable).</b>									
		<i>Strongly Agree---Strongly Disagree</i>						<i>N/A</i>	
1	I had a lot of experience of seminar/tutorial group discussion in my previous study.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A	
2	I had a lot of experience of group presentations (non-assessed) in my previous study.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A	
3	I had a lot of experience of group presentations (assessed) in my previous study.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A	
4	I had a lot of experience of written group reports (assessed) in my previous study.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A	
<b>Group work experience with multicultural groups</b>									
5	I have a lot of experience of studying with people from the same cultural background.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A	
6	I have a lot of experience of studying with people of diverse cultural backgrounds.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A	
<b>How were your groups normally formed? (1 = Never, 6 = Always, N/A = Not Applicable)</b>									
		<i>Never -----Always</i>						<i>N/A</i>	
7	The tutor assigned the groups.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A	
8	Students formed groups by picking the people they wanted to work with.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A	
9	The tutor formed the groups randomly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A	
10	Students formed groups randomly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A	
<b>What was the student make-up of your groups? (1 = Never, 6 = Always, N/A = Not Applicable)</b>									
		<i>Never -----Always</i>						<i>N/A</i>	
11	My group-mates were mainly non-native speakers of English.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A	
12	My group-mates were mainly native speakers of English.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A	

13	My group-mates were mainly international students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
14	My group-mates were mainly British students.	1	2	3	4	5	6	N/A
<b>PART B</b>								
<b>Look at the following statements about working in groups. Please circle the most relevant number (1 = Strongly Disagree and 6 = Strongly Agree).</b>								
		<i>Strongly Agree --- Strongly Disagree</i>						
15	Working with students from other cultures helps me to understand the wider world community better.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
16	Interacting with peers for group assignments enriches my knowledge and understanding of my subject.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
17	It is difficult to reach a consensus when working on group assignments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
18	My group mates would drag my score down if we were assessed as a group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
19	Working in mixed-culture groups interferes with my academic development.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
20	Doing assignments in groups increases the probability of conflict among group members.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
21	Group assignments provide opportunities to get useful feedback on one's understanding of the topic.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
22	Finding a time to meet or an effective way to communicate for group assignments is difficult.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
23	Group assignments should be assessed on an individual basis.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
24	Working in mixed-culture groups is a great chance for non-native speakers to practise English-speaking skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
25	Cooperating with the other members of the group for the purpose of working on assignments is difficult.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
26	Working with students from other first language backgrounds makes me reluctant to communicate.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
27	Students from a similar cultural background to myself respond better to me than students from a different cultural background.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
28	Tutors should systematically mix local and international students for group assignments	1	2	3	4	5	6	
29	Interacting with peers from different cultural backgrounds enriches my knowledge and understanding of my subject.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
30	Group assignments provide valuable opportunities to learn from my peers' contributions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
31	Group assignments are bad unless everyone makes an equal effort.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
32	It is fair that groupwork assessment is based on the performance of the entire group.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
33	Working in mixed-culture groups improves my flexibility in communication.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
34	Group assignments will provide an opportunity for everyone to feel included.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
35	Many non-native speakers don't speak English well enough to be able to function properly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
36	Working with people from other cultural backgrounds is difficult because they have different working styles.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
37	Tutors should provide good support when we face difficulties in our group assignments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	
38	Working in mixed-culture groups is good training for working in international workplaces.	1	2	3	4	5	6	

39	Group assignments provide valuable opportunities to reflect on and re-evaluate one's own ideas.	1	2	3	4	5	6
41	Doing assignments as a group will be more efficient than if doing them individually.	1	2	3	4	5	6
42	It is really important to create a group atmosphere in which everyone feels comfortable to express their views.	1	2	3	4	5	6
43	Native English speakers are less patient with non-native English speakers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
		<i>Strongly Agree ----Strongly Disagree</i>					
44	Mixed-culture groupwork is a safe environment for non-native speakers to learn to express their ideas in English better.	1	2	3	4	5	6
45	Tutors should provide good feedback and fair results for our group assignments.	1	2	3	4	5	6
46	Participating in group assignments gives me an opportunity to consider different opinions and thus broaden my understanding.	1	2	3	4	5	6
47	Coordinating the work between the group members effectively will be difficult in group assignments.	1	2	3	4	5	6
48	Non-native English speakers are more comfortable speaking with other non-native English speakers.	1	2	3	4	5	6
49	Overall, the advantages of working in mixed-culture groups outweigh the disadvantages.	1	2	3	4	5	6
50	I prefer to work with students from the same first language background.	1	2	3	4	5	6
51	Working with students from other cultures puts me under pressure and makes me feel uncomfortable.	1	2	3	4	5	6
52	Working in mixed-culture groups is a great opportunity to meet people from different cultural backgrounds.	1	2	3	4	5	6
53	Tutors should understand some of the challenges of working in mixed-culture groups.	1	2	3	4	5	6

**Final Question:** How has your attitude towards mixed-culture groupwork changed since the beginning of your master course?

*Did anything particularly interesting happen when you worked with your group mates this year? Would you be interested in sharing your stories about your group work experience? If so, please get in touch via email: [Xiaozhe.Cai@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:Xiaozhe.Cai@warwick.ac.uk)*

*I'd love to hear from you.*

## 8.5 Appendix 4: Adapted statements from SAGA instrument

<b>Original items in SAGA (Kimmel and Volet, 2012)</b>	<b>Adapted version in my questionnaires</b>
Interacting with peers for this group assignment will enrich my knowledge and understanding	Interacting with peers for group assignments enriches my knowledge and understanding of my subject.
It will be hard to reach a consensus when working on this group assignment	It is difficult to reach a consensus when working on group assignments.
I think tutors should systematically mix local and international students for group assignments	Tutors should systematically mix local and international students for group assignments
This group assignment will provide me with the opportunity to get feedback on my understanding	Group assignments provide opportunities to get useful feedback on one's understanding of the topic.
This group assignment may generate conflict among members	Doing assignments in groups increases the probability of conflict among group members.
This group assignment will give me a chance to learn from my peers' contributions	Group assignments provide valuable opportunities to learn from my peers' contributions.
This group assignment should be assessed on an individual basis	Group assignments should be assessed on an individual basis.
Finding an effective way of coordinating the work between the group members will be difficult in this assignment	Coordinating the work between the group members effectively will be difficult in group assignments.
This group assignment will provide an opportunity for everyone to feel included	Group assignments will provide an opportunity for everyone to feel included.
Participating in this group assignment will give me a chance to consider different opinions and thus broaden my understanding	Participating in group assignments gives me an opportunity to consider different opinions and thus broaden my understanding.
Finding a time to meet or an effective way to communicate for this group assignment will be difficult	Finding a time to meet or an effective way to communicate for group assignments is difficult.